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### Ecclesiology in Dialogue : a Critique of the Understanding of the Nature of the Church in the Thought of G. C. Berkouwer

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Norman, Bruce Richard, Ph.D.

Andrews University, 1991

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Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

ECCLESIOLOGY IN DIALOGUE: A CRITIQUE OF THE UNDERSTANDING  
OF THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH IN THE THOUGHT  
OF G. C. BERKOUWER

A Dissertation  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

by  
Bruce Richard Norman

May 1991

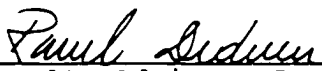
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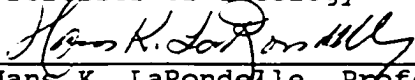
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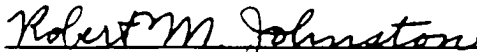
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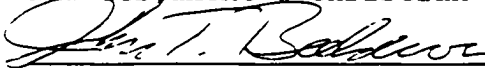
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ABSTRACT

ECCLESIOLOGY IN DIALOGUE: A CRITIQUE OF THE UNDERSTANDING  
OF THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH IN THE THOUGHT  
OF G. C. BERKOUWER

by

Bruce Norman

Advisor: Raoul Dederen

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: ECCLESIOLOGY IN DIALOGUE: A CRITIQUE OF THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH IN THE THOUGHT OF G. C. BERKOUWER

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Date completed: May 1991

This dissertation deals with the concept of the nature of the church in the thought of G. C. Berkouwer as indicated in the following chapter sketches.

Chapter 1 briefly outlines the historical and theological development of thought about the nature of the church, her function, and the interrelationship of the two. The most revelant elements of the church's nature are identified, described, and analyzed in both Roman Catholic and Reformed thought.

Chapter 2 presents biographical, methodological, and theological backgrounds of Berkouwer. These provide the framework within which one must understand Berkouwer's view of the nature of the church.

Chapter 3 describes and analyzes Berkouwer's understanding of the nature of the church. It interprets the manner in which the Dutch theologian relates the church's essence to her function.

This study ends, in chapter 4, with a critical appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of Berkouwer's position on the nature of the church. It is concluded that his model for solving the tension between the church's essence and her function is inadequate because it fails to take into account all of the pressing questions which need to be addressed by contemporary ecclesiology. Finally, some of the tensions of the Dutch theologian's view on the nature of the church are raised as fruitful areas for further investigation.



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#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No one comes to the end of a doctoral dissertation without a keen awareness of his indebtedness to a large number of people. I wish to express my gratitude to the members of my committee: Dr. Raoul Dederen (chairman), Dr. Hans LaRondelle, and Dr. Robert Johnston. My special thanks goes to Dr. Dederen, who through the process, has given much valuable advice.

I would also like to express my sincere and profound appreciation to my wife Chris for her part in making this possible. She has been a true friend and our financial provider through this process. Both my wife and my son Alec, who was born during the writing of my dissertation, have known what it is, at times, to be without a husband and father. I thank them both for their understanding and willingness to help me complete this project.

Finally, without the continued help of God, I would have never been able to come to the completion of this dissertation. I express my thanks to him who has sustained me and called me to complete this undertaking.

## INTRODUCTION

John Macquarrie has pointed out that "probably more gets written on the Church nowadays than on any other single theological theme."<sup>1</sup> Yet, the systematization of the doctrine of the church is something of relatively late development in Christian thought.<sup>2</sup> In fact, only since the Reformation has this doctrine received prominence in theology.<sup>3</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan has pointed out that the doctrine of the church can really be considered "the leitmotiv of the twentieth century."<sup>4</sup> From the beginning of the twentieth century, and for a number of reasons, theology almost has been forced to pay more meticulous attention to it.<sup>5</sup> There has been, to begin with, the

---

<sup>1</sup>Principles of Christian Theology (New York: Scribner's, 1966), 346.

<sup>2</sup>This is probably due to the fact that the doctrine of the church never became a subject of controversy in the same way as the Trinity or Christology, nor was it specifically thematized in the patristic period, although some aspects of ecclesiology were dealt with by such as Ignatius and the Didache. Cyprian (200-258) probably came the closest to dealing with the nature of the church and her unity, but again, this was set in the context of refuting schismatics, especially the Novatians. See Peter C. Hodgson and Robert C. Williams, "The Church," in Christian Theology, ed. Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985):249, and Justo Gonzalez, A History of Christian Thought, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 1:238-246.

<sup>3</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, The Christian Tradition, vol. 5, Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (since 1700) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989): 288. The Reformation debate was largely dominated by two questions, one of which was "Where can I find the true Church?" See Paul Avis, The Church in the Theology of the Reformers (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 1.

<sup>4</sup>Pelikan, 5:289-290.

<sup>5</sup>Millard Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 1025-1148.

unfolding of the ecumenical movement.<sup>1</sup> Other factors include a concern for Biblical theology, the practical necessities of overseas missions, and a renewed interest in the social aspects of worship.<sup>2</sup> These concerns have raised questions about the nature of the church.<sup>3</sup> This was considered to be the basic issue in 1948 at Amsterdam when, in the aftermath of World War 2, the World Council of Churches was founded and still remains in the forefront of discussions about the church today.<sup>4</sup> The modern quest for the unity of the church has unquestionably given an increased significance to the matter.

Contemporary viewpoints on the nature of the church vary. Some theologians look to church history to tell them what the church

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<sup>1</sup>James Duke, "An Ecclesiological Inventory," Mid-Stream 19 (1980): 267.

<sup>2</sup>Bernard Reardon, "Recent Thinking on Christian Beliefs: V. The Doctrine of the Church in Recent Catholic Theology," Expository Times 88 (1976-77): 164-168.

<sup>3</sup>The nature of the church deals with her ontology or *raison d'être* by asking such questions as: What is the Church? What is her essence? What is it that makes the church her unique self? (Erickson, 1027, and Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., Christian Dogmatics, 2 vols. [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984], 2:183). See also Dale Moody, The Word of Truth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 440-447; J. G. Davies, "Church," in A Dictionary of Christian Theology, ed. Alan Richardson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 65-66; Braaten and Jenson, 2:203-221; and Geddes MacGregor, Corpus Christi (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), 3-22.

<sup>4</sup>Earl D. Radmacher, What the Church Is All About (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 8. See also Erickson, 1027. In fact, one can see the importance of the issue in modern theology by observing the inclusion of a section on the nature of the church in a number of modern systematic theologies. See, for example, Erickson, 1025-1050; Kenneth Cauthen, Systematic Theology: A Modern Protestant Approach (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 290-331; Helmut Thielicke, The Evangelical Faith, trans. G. Bromiley, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 3:208-214; and Braaten and Jenson, 2:203-221. Even Radmacher's volume was given the title The Nature of the Church when first published. For the importance of the issue in Roman Catholic circles, one can, for example, consult the section on the nature of the church in Avery Dulles and Patrick Granfield, The Church: A Bibliography (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1985), 53-66.

is.<sup>1</sup> Others define the nature of the church as the extension of the incarnation of Christ,<sup>2</sup> as the people of God,<sup>3</sup> or as a mystical communion.<sup>4</sup> She is also described in terms of her function as servant or herald.<sup>5</sup> Roman Catholicism has a number of schools of thought, some understanding the nature of the church in terms of her hierarchy, others as a mystical body, and still others as a sacrament.<sup>6</sup> Since the nature of the church is such a disputed issue, an in-depth study of it is well-warranted. The clarification of her nature bears on such significant questions as who can be a member of the church, where her authority lies and what it is, how she should be governed, what her mission is, what ordination should be, and how her ministry should be carried out.

Another dimension needs to be mentioned here. The present century has seen a shift in emphasis in ecclesiology, a shift which has significantly affected our topic. Rather than being perceived in terms of her essence, the church is now increasingly understood in terms of

---

<sup>1</sup>Erickson, 1029. For a description of some of these views see; Radmacher, 87-114, Eric Jay, The Church: Its Changing Image through Twenty Centuries (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978), 295-412; and, Avery Dulles, Models of the Church (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1978). There also appears to be much confusion generated by multiple uses of the word "church" (Erickson, 1026). This seems to indicate confusion on a more basic level, i.e., the nature of the church.

<sup>2</sup>Macquarrie, 348.

<sup>3</sup>Thielicke, 3:210.

<sup>4</sup>See Braaten and Jenson, 2:214. Listed as proponents of this view are, on the Roman Catholic side, Yves Congar and Arnold Rademacher; Emil Brunner, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Rudolph Sohm from the Protestant perspective.

<sup>5</sup>Braaten and Jenson, 2:216. See also Dulles, Models, 76-88 ("Herald") and 89-102 ("Servant"). Since both history and theology refer to the church by using the feminine pronoun, this study will retain that practice.

<sup>6</sup>See Bonaventure Kloppenburg, The Ecclesiology of Vatican II, trans. M. O'Connell (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1974), and Avery Dulles, "A Half Century of Ecclesiology," Theological Studies 50 (1989): 419-442.

her empirical presence in the world.<sup>1</sup> This is due, in part, to a growing aversion in our century to metaphysics and ontology.<sup>2</sup> What is being stressed is the concrete historical manifestation of the church, i.e., what the church really "is" rather than what she "should be." This has led many to appreciate and define her nature in terms of her dynamic activity, i.e., what she does rather than what she is.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, one may ask, however, whether defining the church in terms of what she does is a valid way of understanding her nature. Should one, as Earl D. Radmacher claims, talk about what the church is before one can understand what the church should do, or should it be vice versa?<sup>4</sup> Is it possible theologically to speak about the essence of the church in terms of her function? What is the proper relationship between these two dimensions of the church?

#### Purpose

I intend to investigate the relationship between the church's essence and her function as represented in the contemporary model of the church proposed by the eminent Dutch Reformed theologian, Gerrit

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<sup>1</sup>Erickson, 1029. Empirical is understood here as viewing the church as it is in its historical concreteness of visibility and accessibility, not in its abstract or ideal form, i.e., what the church ought to be or what ought to happen in and through the church. See G. C. Berkouwer, The Church, trans. J. E. Davison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 8-10. Hans Küng (The Church [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967]) also follows the same line of thinking about the church in her "empirical" sense (1-39, especially 4-5). It is interesting to note that Küng entitles the first section of his book on the church "The Church As It Is." J. M. R. Tillard (Église d'Églises [Paris: Le Cerf, 1987]), another Roman Catholic ecclesiologist, discusses this subject in his latest book on the church on pp. 399-401.

<sup>2</sup>Erickson, 1028-1030.

<sup>3</sup>James Boice, Foundations of the Christian Faith (Downer's Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1986), 566. This stress on activity should be praised because the church can only be known to others as she visibly testifies to the world of the redemptive purposes of God to all. See also Hodgson and Williams, 249.

<sup>4</sup>Radmacher, 8. He goes on to state that "understanding the nature of the church is basic and foundational to the programming of its activities."

Cornelius Berkouwer. Berkouwer has been chosen for a number of reasons. Not only is he considered by many as one of the most influential theologians in contemporary conservative Christianity,<sup>1</sup> he also represents the Reformed tradition,<sup>2</sup> one of the major ecclesiological traditions growing out of the sixteenth-century debate about the church.<sup>3</sup> Besides, much of Berkouwer's career was spent in dialogue with Roman Catholicism, precisely in the area of ecclesiology.<sup>4</sup> Finally, Berkouwer himself has attempted to deal with the tension

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<sup>1</sup>John Jefferson considers him as one of the leading evangelical theologians in Europe (Theology Primer [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981]: 41). In the opinion of James Daane, Berkouwer has "become one of the most respected voices of conservative Christianity today" ("The Man Who Understands Karl Barth," Eternity 2 [June 1960]: 25). Louis Smedes ("Translator's Preface," of G. C. Berkouwer, The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism, trans. L. B. Smedes [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], 5) describes Berkouwer as being a "theologian in the most profound and at the same time most universal sense of the word." John Hesselink concurs that Berkouwer is among the most influential theological writers of our time ("Recent Developments in Dutch Protestant Theology," Reformed Theological Review 18 [1969]: 46. Again, we are reminded by Carl Bogue (A Hole in the Dike: Critical Aspects of Berkouwer's Theology [Cherry Hill, New Jersey: Mack Publishing Co., 1977], 3) that Berkouwer's "influence, direct and indirect, is tremendous among evangelicals far beyond his homeland in our generation." Even Karl Barth, though not commenting on Berkouwer's ecclesiological views, refers to him as one who has truly understood his [Barth's] doctrine of salvation. See Church Dogmatics, vol. 4, part 3, Jesus Christ, The True Witness, trans. G. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1962), 173-180.

<sup>2</sup>I wish to make a distinction between the terms Reformed, Lutheranism, and Protestantism. Reformed is used in this investigation to refer to the tradition of the Reformation which developed from Calvin, in contradistinction to that which developed from Luther, referred to as Lutheranism. Protestantism is used in an inclusive sense of the general movement of reform which objected to Roman Catholicism.

<sup>3</sup>Berkouwer's own tradition is that of the Gereformeerde Kerken, a minority breakoff from the Dutch Reformed Church. For more information, see Doede Nauta, "The Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland and the Christian Reformed Church," in Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church, ed. Peter de Klerk and Richard de Ridder (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 297-324, and Willem van't Spijker, "The Christian Reformed Church and the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland," Perspectives, 363-383.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, Lewis B. Smedes, "Translator's Preface," 5. Berkouwer was invited by John XXIII to be an official observer at the Second Vatican Council on the basis of his previous polemics against Roman Catholics. See the bibliography for Berkouwer's works dealing with Roman Catholicism.



existing between what the church is and what she does. This can be seen, for example, when he writes,

There can be no theoretical 'contemplation' of being 'in itself,' an isolated 'essence' of the church as a 'mystical' reality. Rather, there can only be a penetrating, indissoluble connection with the concrete life of the Church on earth, directed to a unique 'representation' of Christ's work of salvation and of His fullness. It is precisely these connections which keep the Church from all vagueness, abstraction, and mysteriousness, since she is placed in the framework of relatedness and growth, of fellowship and subjection, and of calling and service. The Church as the body of Christ signifies her essential functionality in Christ, not as an antithesis to her 'being,' but as the mode of this reality . . .<sup>1</sup>

Again, we read,

If the Church is truly the Church, the problem of two kinds of ecclesiology, in which stress is laid either on the Church's being or on her functionality in the world, dissolves. For the Church's being cannot be split up, since the Church as the Church of Jesus Christ is the light of the world and the salt of the earth. The confession of continuity is possible only from this inseparableness; otherwise, the perpetuity of the Church, her continuing presence in the world, becomes unfruitful.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Church, 88. Er is nl. geen sprake van een theoretisch «schouwen» in een benadering, die het «zijn» op zichzelf op het oog heeft, een geïsoleerd «wezen» der kerk als «mystieke» realiteit, maar van een indringend en onlosmakelijk verband met het concrete leven der kerk op aarde, gericht op een unieke «representatie» van het heilswerk van Christus en van Zijn volheid. Juist in deze verbanden, waarin alle beelden hun plaats hebben, verliest het uitzicht op de kerk al het vage en abstracte en mysterieuze, nu zij gesteld wordt in de kaders van verbondenheid en groei, van gemeenschap en onderworpenheid, van roeping en dienst. Men kan zeggen, dat de kerk als lichaam van Christus gezien wordt in haar Christus wezenlijke functionaliteit en dan niet - in een vals dilemma - in tegenstelling tot haar «zijn», maar in de modus van deze werkelijkheid . . . [Dutch edition (hereafter referred to as DE), 1: 107]).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 196-197. In haar waarlijk kerk-zijn vervalt het probleem van de tweeërlei ecclesiologie, waarin het accent gelegd wordt op het zijn der kerk of haar functionaliteit in de wereld. Wanneer men hier «accenten» gaat leggen en ze bijna tot tegenstellingen laat uitgroeien, is men ten offer gevallen aan een misverstand van het zijn der kerk, dat niet kan worden opgesplitst, nu de kerk - als kerk van Jezus Christus - licht der wereld en zout der aarde is. De belijdenis der continuïteit is alleen vanuit deze ondeelbaarheid mogelijk en verstaanbaar. In vele «accenten» - hozeer ook in reactie begripelijk - kan te kort gedaan worden aan wat Christus in en met de kerk bedoelde (Dutch edition, 1: 244). Note that the original text is stronger in condemning the practice of separating being and function when it states, "When one puts their accents here [on either being or function] and all but develop them into an antithesis, one has fallen victim to a misunderstanding of the being of the church . . ." (Wanneer men . . . het zijn der kerk, [the author of this study's translation, hereafter referred to as AT]).

Thus, he is attempting to address one of the current pivotal problems of contemporary ecclesiology.

#### Method

I begin with a general survey of Berkouwer's ecclesiological background and then proceed towards a more specific understanding of his view of the church's nature. In chapter 1, the study provides a brief historical survey of the debate over the definition of the church's nature from the Reformation to our own time, with particular emphasis on how her essence and function were understood and related.<sup>1</sup> It is hoped that this survey will allow us to discern the theological backdrop to Berkouwer's ecclesiology.<sup>2</sup> Chapter 2 intends to furnish the reader with an overview of Berkouwer as a theologian--his life, theology, and methodology. The purpose here is to endeavor to see how his view of the church relates to his general theological system. Chapter 3 explores Berkouwer's understanding of the nature of the church as function. Chapter 4 then attempts to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Berkouwer's perception of the church's essence in terms of function.

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<sup>1</sup>Because of his polemics against Roman Catholicism, especially the latter's ecclesiology, the development of the idea of the nature of the church from a Roman Catholic perspective is considered along with the development of the issue in Reformed thought. Special attention is given as to how the issue developed in the Dutch Reformed tradition. Not meant as an exhaustive study, this survey is written from the perspective of the main thrust of this thesis, i.e. that of understanding the interrelationship of function and essence in Berkouwer's understanding of the nature of the church.

<sup>2</sup>Theologians do not develop their theology in a vacuum. They are affected by their historical context as well as by presuppositions (see Peter Riga, "The Ecclesiology of Johann Adam Möhler," Theological Studies 22 [1961]: 565). As Richard McBrien notes, "I suggest that one of the principal reasons for pluralism in ecclesiology is pluralism in theological method. How we view any item of the Christian tradition is always modified by the distinctive of our theological looking-glass" (Church: The Continuing Quest [New York: Newman Press, 1970], 8). See also Lionel Mascarenhas, "The Changing Face of Ecclesiology," Indian Journal of Theology 26 (1977): 1-11.

### Limitations

A study of this kind has its inherent limitations. I recognize that ecclesiology covers a wide range of issues, including such topics as the nature of the church, her role in society, her governance and structure, her authority, and her unity, as well as her sacraments and ministry. Each of these questions, pressing and vital as they may be to formulating a complete ecclesiology, cannot be covered comprehensively since each of them deserves, in its own right, a specific study. Therefore, I have chosen to deal only with the topic of the nature of the church, and that solely from the perspective of G. C. Berkouwer. The other crucial issues are important only as they shed light upon his view of the church's nature.

### Definition of Terms

A few key terms used throughout this study need to be defined. The first of these is essence. Essence is that which makes something what it is. It is the indispensable defining characteristic which makes something identifiable, i.e., that which is necessary and unchanging about it. Without essence a thing, in this case the church, would cease to exist.<sup>1</sup> Two terms, ontology and nature, are integrally related to the word essence. Ontology is a study of being, an investigation of existence itself regardless of something's appearance. It describes the inner characteristics which identify that which is unchangeable in something.<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this study, ontology means that which makes the church her unique self and without which, she would no longer be the church. Nature is used to refer to the internal unchanging

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<sup>1</sup>Peter A. Angeles, "Essence," Dictionary of Philosophy (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1981), 80-81, and Johannes Lotz, "Essence," in Philosophical Dictionary, ed. Walter Brugger and trans. Kenneth Baker (Spokane, Washington: Gonzaga University Press, 1972), 114-115.

<sup>2</sup>See Angeles, "Ontology," 198, and Lotz, "Ontology," in Brugger, 291-292.

foundational substance which makes something uniquely itself.<sup>1</sup> Because of their similarity of meaning and for the purposes of this study, these three terms are used interchangeably.

#### Review of Literature

As far as can be determined, nine dissertations have been written which either deal with Berkouwer's thought itself or address some aspect of his theology in connection with another theologian. One of these dissertations speaks to his theological method,<sup>2</sup> another addresses Berkouwer's concept of providence,<sup>3</sup> and a third studies his view of election.<sup>4</sup> Two dissertations discuss the nature of authority

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<sup>1</sup>See Johannes Lotz, "Nature," in Brugger, 271-273; and Angeles, 186-187.

<sup>2</sup>Gary Lynn Watts, "The Theological Method of G. C. Berkouwer," (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Theology, 1981). Watts investigates Berkouwer's particular approach to theology in light of the role that the Holy Spirit takes in making Scripture authoritative.

<sup>3</sup>Philip Allen Cooley, "Selected Models of God-World Relationship in the Twentieth Century Theology: Implications for a Contemporary Doctrine of Providence," (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981). One entire chapter examines Berkouwer's view of providence which Cooley describes as a "monarchical model". He considers Berkouwer's model as being poorly connected with the living experience of modern persons. According to Cooley, this obscures God's active presence in the world.

<sup>4</sup>Alvin Lee Baker, "A Critical Evaluation of G. C. Berkouwer's Doctrine of Election" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976). Baker published a popular form of this dissertation in 1981 under the title Berkouwer's Doctrine of Election: Balance or Imbalance? (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.). The author criticizes Berkouwer for being too subjectively oriented in the area of election, which causes Baker to feel that Berkouwer's doctrine of election tends to neglect God's part in the "before" stage of election. The before stage being the eternal decree of God in election before the world and man was created.

in Berkouwer,<sup>1</sup> while three deal with his concept of general and special revelation.<sup>2</sup>

Of the nine, the only dissertation that deals with any aspect of Berkouwer's ecclesiology is that authored by Jacob Petrus Forstenberg.<sup>3</sup> Here, Forstenberg demonstrates how the two themes of grace and the authority of the church are the foundational points of contention between Berkouwer and Roman Catholicism. Of particular interest is Forstenberg's insight into the reason why Berkouwer rejects

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<sup>1</sup>The first of these was written in 1964 by Paul Donald Collord ("The Problem of Authority for Dogmatics in G. C. Berkouwer" [Ph.D. dissertation, State University of Iowa]). Collord points out that both special and general revelation are normative for dogmatics in Berkouwer. In his view, Berkouwer rejects historical criticism but maintains that the intent and reality of God's speaking in the Scriptures is authoritative for doing theology.

The second dissertation was written by Andrew Dooman Chang in 1985 ("Crisis of Biblical Authority: A Critical Examination of Biblical Authority in Contemporary Theology with Special Reference to Functionalism" [Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary]). Berkouwer is discussed as Jack Rogers Doktorvater. Berkouwer and Rogers are presented under the rubric of soteriological functionalism in regard to Biblical authority.

<sup>2</sup>John James Arnold, "A Study of the Christologies of H. Emil Brunner and Gerrit C. Berkouwer" (Ph.D. dissertation, Hartford Seminary, 1967). Chapter three, dealing with Berkouwer, states that all knowledge of God comes from faith for the Dutch theologian, thus causing him to reject the historical critical method in dealing with Scripture. Arnold concludes that Berkouwer's view of the revelatory significance of the historical life of Jesus in opposition to Brunner's rejection of the tangible history of Christ as being a revelation of propositional truth cannot be sustained.

In 1984, Gerry Everett Breshears ("Faith and General Revelation in the Tradition and Theology of G. C. Berkouwer" [Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Theology]) investigated Berkouwer's contribution to the subject of general revelation. He concluded that Berkouwer's unwarranted limitation of the Biblical data seen in his refusal to acknowledge any knowledge of God in fallen human beings and in his refusal to see fallen human beings as image bearers is at the very least a dangerous position.

Robert Bryant Barnes (in 1986) wrote a dissertation entitled "The Concept of Revelation among Selected Twentieth-Century Theologians: James Orr, Edward J. Carnell, and G. C. Berkouwer" (Th.D. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary). Barnes devoted an entire chapter to Berkouwer's view of general revelation, concluding that Berkouwer never changed his view of revelation as bringing a true disclosure of God.

<sup>3</sup>"Authority and Grace: Central Themes in G. C. Berkouwer's Critical Dialogue with Roman Catholic Theology" (D.Th. dissertation, University of South Africa, 1982).

Rome's claim to authority--Rome has identified the church with Christ. While this touches upon the nature of the church in Berkouwer, Forstenberg is more interested in the authority of the church as a central theme in Berkouwer's dialogue with Roman Catholicism than the theological explanation of the essence of the church. Thus, none of the nine dissertations aforementioned deals specifically with Berkouwer's understanding of the nature of the church.

What is true of the dissertations is also true of other major articles and books written about Berkouwer and his theological views. In Lewis Smedes' article dealing with Berkouwer's theology, hardly a reference is made to Berkouwer's ecclesiology.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, I. J. Hesselink says nothing about Berkouwer's ecclesiology in his article about Dutch theology.<sup>2</sup> The same can be noted of J. C. de Moor,<sup>3</sup> G. W. de Jong,<sup>4</sup> and Carl Bogue.<sup>5</sup> Since there has not been an in-depth study of Berkouwer's understanding of the nature of the church, the need for such an investigation is well-warranted.

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<sup>1</sup>"G. C. Berkouwer," in Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology, ed. P. E. Hughes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 63-97.

<sup>2</sup>I. J. Hesselink, "Recent Developments in Dutch Protestant Theology," Reformed Theological Review 28 (1969):41-54.

<sup>3</sup>Towards a Biblically Theological Method (Kampen: Kok, 1980). This work is a structural analysis of Berkouwer's hermeneutic-dogmatic method.

<sup>4</sup>De Theologie van Dr. G. C. Berkouwer: Een Strukturele Analyse (Kampen: Kok, 1971). This is also a structural analysis of Berkouwer's theology in light of his methodology of correlation.

<sup>5</sup>A Hole in the Dike. Critical Aspects of Berkouwer's Theology (Cherry Hill, New Jersey: Mack Publishing, 1977). Bogue challenges the assumption that Berkouwer's writings are representative of Reformed theology. But he does not deal with the issue of ecclesiology in Berkouwer.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH: HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUNDS

#### Introduction

One of the significant changes in the ecclesiological debate stemming from the Reformation was the emphasis given the nature of the church as a theological topic in its own right.<sup>1</sup> From this point forward, the issue of the church's essence became an integral part of theological reflection. Since what the church does is intimately related to what she is, it was inevitable that the question of her function arose.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the theological development of the understanding of the church's essence, her function,

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<sup>1</sup>This is not to say that the doctrine was never considered by theologians. It had before this time primarily been viewed in relation with polemicizing against heretical views and practices in the church (see, for example, Jay, 29-158, and Radmacher, 28-31). During the Reformation, the issues of ecclesiology reached their most significant proportions (see Pelikan, Christian Tradition, 4: 70-72; 5: 288; Avis, Theology, 1; idem, "Luther's Theology of the Church," Churchman 97 [1983]: 104-111; Yves M. J. Congar, L'ecclésiologie de S. Augustin à l'époque moderne (Paris: Le Cerf, 1970), 353-354; Louis Bouyer, The Church of God: Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit [Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1982], xi-xii; Wolfhart Pannenberg, The Church, trans. Keith Crim (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 86-88; Geddes MacGregor, Corpus Christi [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958], 3; and Henri de Lubac, "Lumen Gentium and the Fathers," in Vatican II: An Interfaith Approach, ed. John Miller (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1966), 154).

<sup>2</sup>Pelikan, Christian Tradition, 4:71-72, and Heiko Oberman, Forerunners of the Reformation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 207. That the two are closely related has been demonstrated, for example, by Jay, The Church; Avery Dulles, Models of the Church (New York: Doubleday, 1987); and, Hans Küng, The Church, trans. Ray and Rosaleen Ockenden (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 363-491.

and their relationship, beginning with the debate on the nature of the church between Johann Eck and Martin Luther at Leipzig (1519) and proceeding to the era of Vatican Council II (1961-1965).<sup>1</sup> This is done by examining how that particular issue developed in Roman Catholic thought, the Dutch Reformed Tradition, and in the thinking of Karl Barth.<sup>2</sup>

Roman Catholicism: The Church  
as the Body of Christ

Given the many nuances existing within the Roman Catholic view of the church's nature, one is faced with a difficult and complex task when attempting to express them.<sup>3</sup> One theme, however, seems to integrate all views of the Catholic doctrine of the church, i.e., the church as a "the body of Christ." This metaphor has primarily been

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<sup>1</sup>This survey does not intend to give an exhaustive study of the issue as this is beyond my purpose. Rather, I wish to point out the highlights that have affected the 20th-century understanding of the doctrine of the church. For further study on the general development of the doctrine of the church, see, for example, Eric Jay, The Church, 1-410, Congar, L'ecclésiologie, 1-421, Bouyer, 3-155, and Radmacher, 27-114.

<sup>2</sup>These three traditions represent the most significant influences exercised upon Berkouwer. The Dutch Reformed Church is the milieu in which he received his formal and informal training. In this study, I attempt to understand what Luther's view on the nature of the church was and follow his influence through Calvin to modern Dutch Reformed thought on the subject. Roman Catholicism and Karl Barth (considered as part of the Reformed tradition but also as an innovator) are important because of Berkouwer's extensive dialogue with them. Due to their insignificant influence on Berkouwer's ecclesiology, the Separatist and Congregational views of the church, which again likewise are linked to the time of the Reformation, have not been retained. For further study on these latter two views of the church, see Melvin Hodges, A Theology of the Church and Its Mission: A Pentecostal Perspective (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1977); Leslie Newbigin, Household of God (New York: Friendship Press, 1953), 97-119; Colin Williams, New Directions in Theology Today, vol. 4, The Church (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 53-54; Jay, 176-180; and Ernest Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, trans. Olive Wyon, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1931), 1:331.

<sup>3</sup>For examples of the varying views, see Dulles, Models of the Church, 97-193; idem, "Half-Century," 419-442; Congar, L'ecclésiologie, esp. 269-459; and, Küng, Church, 3-43. In dealing with the Roman Catholic understanding of the nature of the church, we are primarily interested in the official pronouncements and positions of the church as a whole rather than in individual theologians and their views.



expressed in two different yet related ways, i.e., a hierarchy and a mystical body.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Hierarchical Model

The hierarchical perception of the body of Christ tends to focus on the visible elements of the church. Its initial definition begins with the church's structural characteristics. It then attempts to relate the church as a living, pilgrim, and spiritual body to that visible earthly structure. This was the dominant way of expressing the nature of the church in the Roman Catholic ecclesiology in the aftermath of the Reformation, and it influenced Catholic thinking for many generations.<sup>2</sup>

*Johann Eck (1486-1543)*

At the time of the Reformation, Johann Eck stressed the view that the church is both visible and hierarchical.<sup>3</sup> As the church of

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<sup>1</sup>That the two are necessarily related is remarkably well underlined by Catholic theologian Claude Dagens when he states, "The hierarchy is only for Communion in the Church. Communion in the Church comes about only through the hierarchy" ("Hierarchy and Communion: The Bases of Authority in the Beginning of the Church," *Communio* 9 [1982]: 67). See also, Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 31-57; idem, "Half-Century," 419-429; and Radmacher, 87-92.

<sup>2</sup>Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 34-46, and idem., "Half-Century," 419-421.

<sup>3</sup>Eck, one of the principle participants in the debate at Leipzig (1519), was able to draw Martin Luther into a discussion about the nature of the church, although the original purpose of the debate was to take issue with Karlstadt over his view of the depravity of man. Eck was a professor of theology at Ingolstadt from 1510 until his death in 1543 and is recognized as one of the most eminent theologians of his age. (James Richard, *Philip Melancthon* [New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1907], 49). His most famous work was his *Enchiridion* written in 1525 (*Enchiridion of Commonplaces of John Eck Against Luther and Other Enemies of the Church*, trans. F. L. Battles [Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1978]). It provided an armory of texts on which later generations of Catholic apologists would continue to draw. (E. O'Connor, "The Catholic Response to the Augsburg Confession," *Communio* 7 [1980]: 184, and "Eck, Johann," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross [New York: Oxford University Press, 1974], 442). The first three chapters dealt with the ecclesiological points at issue between the Catholic Church and the Reformers. The popularity of this volume is seen by its 90 editions produced in 100 years. It was the standard in refuting the Reformers' teaching on the

the Apostles, the church at Rome embodied the essence of the church.<sup>1</sup> For Eck, the church is the congregation of all of the faithful who comprise the body of Christ and who are in communion with Rome through the Catholic bishops. Hence, Eck could say,

We confess the church to be the congregation of all of the faithful who are the body of Christ. . . . [and] the prelates of the church are called "the Church" because they represent her and their subjects. Otherwise, the Church could never be gathered.<sup>2</sup>

The church is less the people of God than a hierarchy where her rulers hold power to define matters of faith. The Roman Catholic Church can, in fact, be thought of as the continuing incarnation of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Because the Roman Catholic Church is hierarchical and the continuing incarnation of Christ, Eck was led to stress her function as a plantatio ecclesiae, i.e., the reproduction of the pattern of the mother church in places where she had not existed before.<sup>4</sup> The church is the school that instructs the heathen in regard to the gospel.<sup>5</sup> The interest of missionary activity is to bring them within the confines of

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church.

<sup>1</sup>Eck, Enchiridion, 1.1.ii. See also P. Fraenkel, "John Eck's Enchiridion of 1525 and Luther's Earliest Arguments against Papal Primacy," Studia Theologica 21 (1967): 145, and Scott Hendrix, Luther and the Papacy (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 87.

<sup>2</sup>Enchiridion 1.4.v. This notion led Eck and Luther to disagree on their understanding of the church as an invisible body. Luther held that one could never "see" the church in her entirety because the whole invisible church would never meet. Eck countered by claiming that the gathering of the prelates is the church and thus could be seen in the hierarchy and councils.

<sup>3</sup>See Enchiridion, Chapter 1, "On the Church and Her Authority." See also R. P. McBrien, Catholicism (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Winston Press, 1981), 632. The idea of the church as the continuing incarnation of Christ was more fully developed by Johann Möhler (see pp. 19-21 below on Möhler).

<sup>4</sup>James Scherer, Missionary, Go Home (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 35. This emphasizes the planting of the mother church's ministry, dogma, order, and ritual so that the younger church always maintains a connection with the mother church through the hierarchy.

<sup>5</sup>John Aberly, An Outline of Missions (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1945), 8.

the boundaries of the ecclesia vera.<sup>1</sup> The church and her institutional structure serve as the instrument of salvation. The ultimate goal of the hierarchical church in mission, therefore, is to complete the contours of the body of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

*The Council of Trent (1545-1563)*

For the framers of the pronouncements of Trent,<sup>3</sup> and following Eck's position the church, as founded by God, is "all of the faithful from Adam till the end of time."<sup>4</sup> She is also the visible

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<sup>1</sup>Dulles, Models of the Church, 38.

<sup>2</sup>J. Verkuyl, Contemporary Missiology, trans. and ed. Dale Cooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 182. This was a result of Aquinas's renewed stress on the idea that outside of the church there is no salvation. In this understanding, the missionary activity of the Roman Catholic Church is coordinated by the pope through the Curia (Dunn, 56).

<sup>3</sup>At the Council of Trent, Roman Catholicism defined her doctrine over and against the Reformer's positions. (Bengt Hägglund, History of Theology [St. Louis: Concordia, 1968], 286). This, among other things, led to a polemical ecclesiology. (James McGovern, The Church in the Churches [Cleveland: Corpus Books, 1968], 20).

<sup>4</sup>Catechism of Trent 9.15 (This study uses Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests, trans. John McHugh and Charles Callan [New York: Joseph F. Wagner, 1934]) and, Jay, 200. Congar reminds us that the Council of Trent did not deal with ecclesiology in explicit terms when he writes, "Fait étrange: ce concile qui devait répondre à la Réforme n'a pas traité le problème ecclésiologique (L'ecclésiologie, 364). Hubert Jedin, the noted Roman Catholic expert on the Council of Trent, commenting upon the Council's end confirms this when he concludes, ". . . for there still remained the discussion of five sacraments and the sacrifice of the Mass; a most urgently needed clarification of the concept of the church, its intrinsic nature and hierarchical structure, culminating in the Papacy; the doctrine of Purgatory and the veneration of the Saints, which had been the object of fierce attacks since the beginning of the schism. The list of controverted doctrines which had not yet been dealt with . . . showed the real state of affairs--great and arduous tasks still remained to be carried out by the Church's teaching authority" (A History of the Council of Trent, trans. Dom Ernest Graf, 2 vols. [London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957], 2:494). Though little explication is mentioned, the Tridentine canons are sufficiently clear on ecclesiology to allow inferences about it which were later drawn out by those theologians studying the texts of the Council. See also Jay, 196, and J. D. Crichton, "Church and Ministry from the Council of Trent to the First Vatican Council," in The Christian Priesthood, ed. N. Lash and J. R. Hymer (London: Dartman, Longman & Todd, 1970), 117-118.

body of Christ that one enters through baptism.<sup>1</sup> This body is called the "holy mother Rome" because Rome is "the mother and mistress of all the other churches."<sup>2</sup> It is a Christian commonwealth led by the pope. Since the church must be seen by all, she has as her essence a visible and hierarchichal structure.<sup>3</sup>

This emphasis upon the hierarchical and visible nature of the church allowed her mission to remain clear. She is to promote the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church in a given area so that the newer

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<sup>1</sup>Canons, session 6, justification 7 (see H. J. Schroeder, Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent [London: B. Herder, 1941]. This work contains both the complete Latin edition [281-578] and its English translation [1-278]). See also Catechism of Trent 9.23.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Canons, The Sacrament of Baptism, 3; Canons, session 12, decree concerning the Propagation of the Session (Schroeder, 71); Canons, session 14, The Doctrine of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, 3; and, Canons, Oration Delivered in the Last Session (Schroeder, 264).

<sup>3</sup>Catechism of Trent 9.12; Canons, Bull of Convocation and Session 7, Transfer of the Council; and, Canons, Session 23, Canons on the Sacrament of Order, 6-9. Throughout the documents of the Council, the papal and hierarchical conception of the church is assumed (McGovern, 20-21, and Jay, 196). The Catholic theologians rejected the idea of an invisible church as suggested by the Reformers (see McGovern, 20). They chose, rather, to speak of a militant and triumphant church, the former being the one here on this earth and the latter the one in heaven (Jay, 198). The militant must still fight its battle here on this earth, while the triumphant is that happy assemblage of blessed spirits who have triumphed over the world, the flesh, and Satan and are exempt from the trials of this life (Catechism of Trent 9.6). These are not two churches but constituent parts of the one church (ibid.).

Robert Cardinal Bellarmine (1542-1621), one of the prominent expositors of Trent, most fully developed the ecclesiology implicit in its decrees and canons (Joseph Fenton, "Mystici Corporis and Definitions," American Ecclesiastical Review 128 [1953]: 458; McGovern, 23; Joseph Fenton, "Pope Pius XII and the Theological Treatise on the Church," American Ecclesiastical Review 139 [1958]: 407; and J. M. R. Tillard, "The Jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome," Theological Studies 40 [1979]: 8). He held that the church is those who by the same faith and communion were under the lawful rule of the pope. She is both a spiritual and visible body under the rule of the Roman Church and manifests herself in the form of a hierarchy (Fenton, "Pope," 456, and Crichton, 126). Various critics within Roman Catholicism objected to Bellarmine's view feeling that it failed to take into account the important spiritual elements of the church. One of the unintended results of this reaction was to introduce the dimension of the invisible church into Roman Catholic ecclesiology. This permitted the discussion of the spiritual nature of the church to take a greater part in the Roman Catholic view of the church (Fenton, "Mystici," 456). This issue became important at Vatican I. See pp. 15-17 below on the First Vatican Council and its ecclesiology.

churches could be linked to and in communion with the bishop of Rome. As far as its understanding of the function of the church is concerned, as well as its relation to her nature, the Council had merely restated what Eck had expounded. Though many discussed the nature of the church in the years following the Council of Trent, few official pronouncements were made from the Roman Catholic Church on the subject until the convening of Vatican Council I in 1869.<sup>1</sup>

*Vatican Council I (1869-1870)*

Vatican Council I, though it did not ultimately develop a statement on the nature of the church, did begin a study which led to the production of a schema that found fruition at Vatican Council II.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Congar, L'ecclésiologie, 370-449, where he mentions such names as Robert Cardinal Bellarmine (d. 1621), François Suarez (d. 1617), Johann Möhler (d. 1838), and John Henry Cardinal Newman (d. 1890). See also, Bouyer, 91-122; Küng, Church, 11-12; and Jay, 197-204.

<sup>2</sup>Stephen Duffy, "Part Five: The Modern Period," in Papal Infallibility, ed. T. Tekippe (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1983), 61. While its introduction stated that "it was to show those in error what the true church is" ("Schema of a Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Prepared for the Examination of the Fathers of the Vatican Council," in Papal Teachings: The Church, sel. and arr. by the Benedictine Monks of Solesmes, trans. E. O'Gorman [Boston: Daughters of Saint Paul, 1962], 809), the schema was never submitted in its final form to the Council Fathers because of the interruption of the Council by the Franco-Prussian war of 1870.

Vatican I is regarded by many as the capstone of Catholic Tridentine ecclesiology. Its primary focus was the relationship of the bishops to the pope (Dom Cuthbert Butler, The Vatican Council (1869-1870), ed. Christopher Butler [London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1962], 11). One of the reasons for convening Vatican Council I was to address one of the basic "errors" of Protestantism, i.e., its denial of the hierarchical structure of the church and her authority to teach unerringly (John Dolan, Catholicism [New York: Barron's Educational Series, 1968], 185). Another was to settle the ecclesiological dispute between Gallicanism and Ultramontanism (Congar, L'ecclésiologie, 437-440 and D. Butler, 27-62). See also Roger Aubert, The Church in a Secularised Society (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 60-69; idem., "The Vatican Council," in The Church in the Age of Liberalism, by Roger Aubert, Johannes Beckmann, Patrick Corish, and Rudolph Lill, trans. Peter Becker (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 315-334; Congar, L'ecclésiologie, 440-450; Guiseppe Alberigo, "The Authority of the Church in the Documents of Vatican I and Vatican II," trans. A. Matteo, Journal of Ecumenical Studies 19 (1982): 125-126; and Patrick Granfield, "The Church as Societas Perfecta in the Schema of Vatican I," Church History 48 (1979): 445. The passages referred to in this study are taken from: Documents of Vatican Council I, 1869-1870, trans. and sel.

For the Council, the church is "visible, hierachical," and "consists of those who are in communion with Rome."<sup>1</sup> One of the primary contributions to the Roman Catholic view of the nature of the church was its description of the church as a society.<sup>2</sup> This society is religious in nature, a true and perfect society on this earth. Although it is of a spiritual and supernatural nature, the society is "hierarchical, visible and headed by the pope."<sup>3</sup>

The function of this perfect society is to teach all nations the gospel, bringing them under the governance and teaching authority of the church. The church, in this sense, is said to be "a standard set up for the nations to see and embrace."<sup>4</sup> Her witness is of a divine order and comes as a divine mandate.<sup>5</sup> Since the Roman Church is the true church, her function is again that of plantatio ecclesia. Except for

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John Broderick (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1971). For further documentation, see Joseph Denzinger, The Sources of Catholic Dogma, trans. Roy Deferrari (St. Louis: Herder, 1957), 586-608.

<sup>1</sup>Pastori Aeternus 4 and Supremi pastori 10. The terminology demonstrates this when it refers to the Church of Rome as the "Holy mother Church, mistress and mother of all other churches" (Dei Filius 2 and Profession of Faith 8). Furthermore, the gathered bishops were seen as the entire Catholic family (Allocution 8) thus reiterating Eck's view of the church.

<sup>2</sup>Granfield, 431. This view further refined what had been implicit in the documents of the Council of Trent. The church was now a society, a gathering, which is both exterior and visible. Anyone who holds that the church is entirely interior and invisible is an anathema (Supremi pastori, Canon III).

<sup>3</sup>Supremi pastori 3 and 4. This view, unlike that of the Council of Trent, did begin to emphasize more strongly the supernatural and spiritual nature of the church. This may have been due in part to the influence of Johann Möhler (1796-1838), who emphasized the church as the mystical body of Christ, and whom we discuss shortly.

<sup>4</sup>Supremi pastori 2. The Roman Catholic Church alone possesses all the signs divinely given to promote the credibility of the church. The heathen and the "separated churches" are invited, through the church's mission, to the home of the heavenly Father, i.e., the Roman Catholic Church (Iam Vos Omnes 10 and Dei Filius 3).

<sup>5</sup>Dei Filius 3 and Supremi pastori 2. This creates a distinction between the nature of the church and its function, the latter being founded on the former. This is the traditional way of viewing ecclesiology.

the emphasis upon the spiritual nature of the divine mandate which served as the basis for mission, it appears that little progress had been made in regard to the function of the church since the Council of Trent.

*Satis Cognitum (1896)*

Leo XIII's encyclical Satis Cognitum represents a transitional position in Roman Catholicism's view of the nature of the church.<sup>1</sup> It perceives the body of Christ as a hierarchy and a mystery.<sup>2</sup> The church has her foundation in Christ and therefore has a "divine constitution."<sup>3</sup> She is first and foremost a "timeless body which is united to Christ as her head."<sup>4</sup> She is described as a "true and perfect society" in the same hierarchical sense described in the documents of Vatican Council I.<sup>5</sup> She is also defined as "the society of the faithful, united in mind and faith." The church is a spiritual

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<sup>1</sup>Leo XIII (1810-1903), one of the most eminent popes of modern times and one of the most significant contributors to Catholic thought since Medieval times (Ann Freemantle, ed., The Papal Encyclicals in their Historical Context [New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1956], 156-157), wrote this encyclical to bring dissenting denominations back to the Catholic fold (Francis Furey, Life of Leo XIII and History of His Pontificate [New York: Catholic Educational Company, 1903], 473). Its stated purpose is to describe the lineaments of the church (Satis Cognitum 1). The English edition of this encyclical is found in The Irish Ecclesiastical Record 17 (1896): 748-756, 834-858.

<sup>2</sup>See particularly the section on the church as a divine society (paragraph 10), where the church is described as a mystical body.

<sup>3</sup>Paragraph 16.

<sup>4</sup>Paragraph 4.

<sup>5</sup>Paragraph 10. This points out Leo XIII's dependence upon the schema on the church (Supremi Pastoris) given to the Fathers of the first Vatican Council but never discussed because of its unexpected end (Granfield, 441). Satis Cognitum itself recognizes its dependence on Vatican I in paragraphs 9, 15.

as well as a living organism. Still, as the living organism of the faithful, she is visibly connected to her earthly head, Rome.<sup>1</sup>

The function of the church as perceived by the encyclical is to communicate to all men and through all generations the gospel of salvation. Therefore, the church should find herself "in all lands at all times" that men and women might have an opportunity to be in communion with the only true church, i.e., Rome. At the same time, the church must always guard the integrity of the faith and continually strive, by the truth of her doctrine, "to sanctify and save humankind."<sup>2</sup>

What we have seen thus far is that the hierarchical model of the the body of Christ as it developed from Eck and was further expanded by the Council of Trent, Vatican Council I, and the encyclical Satis Cognitum stresses the primary importance of the structure of the church. Her essence is that of a visible hierarchy which resides at Rome. From this perspective, her function is understood in terms of a plantatio ecclesiae, i.e., the planting of the mother church (Rome) in areas where she does not exist so that the newer churches can be in communion with the hierarchy and bishop of Rome, the ecclesia vera. Let us now turn to the other prominent Roman Catholic understanding of the nature of the church, i.e., that of the "mystical body."

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<sup>1</sup>Paragraphs 3.3, 5-10, 11-12. In this sense, the church can never be considered to be several communities held together by a federation, but rather a single fellowship in communion with the hierarchy at Rome (Satis Cognitum 4). The encyclical disavows the idea of an invisible church as understood by Protestants. The church is the union of visible and invisible elements, but the stress is on the visible church.

<sup>2</sup>Paragraphs 4, 9. It is interesting to note the difference in this conception of the church in contradistinction to Protestant thinking. Roman Catholic ecclesiology here holds that the true church can only exist where the Roman Church is. Protestantism, on the other hand, holds that the church exists wherever the church rightly preaches the word and administers the sacraments. The church is thus grounded in the Word rather than a specific place or structure.



## The Mystical Body

Roman Catholic ecclesiology describes the church as "mystical" in order to distinguish the body of Christ as a society whose Head and Ruler is Christ from his physical body which sits at the right hand of God and is present in the Eucharist.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the analogy differentiates the church from any ordinary body in the natural order.<sup>2</sup> Over and against the church understood from a hierarchical perspective, this view characterizes the church as a living body and a pilgrim people though not unrelated to the hierarchy.<sup>3</sup> This approach gained renewed influence in Roman Catholicism, particularly in the last fifty years.<sup>4</sup>

*Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838)*

The concept of the church as the mystical body has its roots in Johann Adam Möhler's thought<sup>5</sup> and received later official

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<sup>1</sup>This is particularly true of the ecclesiology of Roman Catholicism shortly before and following Vatican Council II. For further study, see Dulles, "Half-Century," 421-442. For the concept of mystery and its relation to the understanding of the church, see Karl Rahner, Theological Investigations, vol. 4, More Recent Writings, trans. Kevin Smyth (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1966), 36-73; Avery Dulles, "Mystery (In Theology)," in The New Catholic Encyclopedia, ed. the staff at Catholic University of America, 18 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill Books, 1967), 10: 151-153; and F. X. Lawlor, "Mystical Body of Christ," in The New Catholic Encyclopedia, 10: 166-170.

<sup>2</sup>Mystici Corporis 73 as found in "Mystici Corporis," in Catholic Mind 41 (November, 1941): 23 (the encyclical is given in its entirety in 1-44). See also Dulles, Models of the Church, 48; idem, "Half-Century," 422-423; Congar, L'ecclésiologie, 469-472; Lawlor, 166; Cauthen, 297; and, Newbiggin, 83.

<sup>3</sup>It should be kept in mind that the hierarchy of the church is never in question as far as its role in the church. It is primarily a question of which aspect of the church is emphasized first, her hierarchy or her body.

<sup>4</sup>Dulles, Models of the Church, 46, 39 and idem, "Half-Century," 421-425; Congar, L'ecclésiologie, 469-472; and Bouyer, 104.

<sup>5</sup>Möhler is regarded by some as one of the most significant Roman Catholic ecclesiologists of modern times (Riga, 563-564, and Philip Rosato, "Between Christocentrism and Pneumatocentrism: An Interpretation of Johann Adam Möhler's Ecclesiology," Heythrop Journal 19 [1978]: 46; Bouyer, 104; Congar, L'ecclésiologie, 420-423). One of his most influential contributions to Catholic ecclesiology was to wrestle with the human and divine, the visible and invisible, or the external (visible human) and internal (invisible divine and spiritual)

recognition in Pope Pius XII's encyclical Mystici Corporis (1943).<sup>1</sup> For Möhler, the church is "a living organism spread throughout the world." She includes both "the living and the dead" and should be understood as "the mystical body of Christ."<sup>2</sup> The term "mystical" intends to stress the church's inner divine spiritual and invisible nature as well as that of her visible external hierarchical nature.<sup>3</sup> The church, in his opinion, is both "a mystical body and a visible community of believers, a religious society, founded and built by

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aspects of the church. Because of his stress on the internal aspect of the church, Möhler brought to Roman Catholicism the idea of the mystical body as describing the church (McGovern, 21). The major work of Möhler is his Symbolik oder Darstellung der dogmatischen Gegensätze der Katholiken und Protestanten nach ihren öffentlichen Bekenntnisschriften (Mainz: n.p., 1832), trans. by James Robertson (Symbclism or Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced by Their Symbolical Writings [London: Thomas Baker, 1906]), hereafter referred to as Symbolism. For further study and a bibliography on Möhler, see Paul-Werner Scheele, Johann Adam Möhler (Köln: Styria, 1969); Congar, L'ecclésiologie, 418-423; and Bouyer, 91-106.

<sup>1</sup>Riga, 581, and Yves Congar, "Johann Adam Möhler, 1796-1838," Theologische Quartalschrift 150 (1970): 47. This is not to say that the concept had not been used previously. Lawlor (166) points out that the term's first official use came in 1302 in Pope Boniface's bull Unam Sanctum, although Thomas Aquinas [d. 1274] did deal with the concept. Even Eck, the proponent of a hierarchical view used the term in his Enchiridion [1.1.iv]). Congar admits that for him, Möhler had been an awakener of knowledge (éveilleur) for forty years [1930s to 1970s] (*ibid.*, 50-51). It seems that Möhler's concept of the church as the mystical body has contributed to Roman Catholicism's present openness toward the ecumenical movement (Rosato, 68, and Symbolism 276).

<sup>2</sup>Symbolism, 307-309, 350-353, and McGovern, 21. This emphasis was an alternative to the polemical, anti-Reform ecclesiology of the Eck and Bellarminian type (Riga, 568). The emphasis upon the internal aspect was no doubt related to the effect of Romanticism upon Möhler, which stressed the organic, societal nature of human life and history. (See Yves Congar, "La pensée de Möhler et l'ecclésiologie orthodoxe," Irénikon 12 [1935]: 325.)

<sup>3</sup>Symbolism, 258. His contribution to Roman Catholic ecclesiology in this area was to combine the two aspects of the church into a single sacramental synthesis (Rosato, 68). Subjective unity with Christ, said Möhler, implies an objective unity with the visible church (Symbolism, 258, and Rosato, 63). Thus, one could not have the "invisible" church without the visible (Symbolism, 293, 307, and Riga, 578). This "invisible" church was not the same as the one propounded by the Reformers since the invisible church always needs the visible church and its priesthood (Symbolism, 305, 271).

Christ, which approximates itself to the Roman Church."<sup>1</sup> In order to accent the importance of both the internal (spiritual) and external (visible) aspects of the church, MÖhler introduced the concept of the church as the "visible incarnation" of the Word.<sup>2</sup> The visible institution of the church in communion with Rome is the "continuing incarnation of Christ."<sup>3</sup>

The function of this mystical body as the continuing incarnation is to carry on the work of Christ. Since the church has external as well as internal dimensions, the message of the gospel is to be preached by a visible, human medium. Thus, Christ established a visible community of men (the church) in order to accomplish this. The institution (Church of Rome) provides the basis for the mission of the church since it is only through the latter that redemption can be proclaimed. The purpose of the message is to bring others within the fold of the true church, i.e., in communion with Rome.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The suggestion that the church is a society or communion emphasizes that she is a living organism made up of living members. See Symbolism, 258-271; Congar, "Pensée de MÖhler," 327; and Rosato, 50. The church is a community and communion of believers in Christ which is also seen as the church militant. The church militant, to be sure, remains none other than the Roman Catholic Church (Symbolism, 355).

<sup>2</sup>Symbolism, 259, 307.

<sup>3</sup>A. Houssiau, "Images diverses de l'unité de l'Église," Revue Théologique de Louvain 10 (1979): 152-153. MÖhler's definition reads as follows: "The visible Church is the Son of God as he continually appears in human form among men, as he renews himself steadily, as he rejuvenates himself eternally; the Church is the continuing incarnation [andauernde Fleischwerdung] of the Son of God; just like the whole church, the faithful are also called in the Scriptures the Body of Christ" (Symbolism, 260). This explains MÖhler's view of the church as the mystical body of Christ (Rosato, 64). The visible institution is the means whereby the inner aspect of the "soul of religion" can work on men, thus identifying the church with the church at Rome (Riga, 585, and Rosato, 50). From this perspective, it is the Roman Pontiff who ensures the unity of the church (Houssiau, 156).

<sup>4</sup>Symbolism, 258, 330. The function of the church remains that of a plantatio ecclesiae. This illustrates the fact that the hierarchy of the church has not been neglected by Roman Catholic ecclesiology even when speaking about her spiritual internal nature as MÖhler attempted to do.

*Mystici Corporis* (1943)

Mystici Corporis officially moved Roman Catholic ecclesiology away from the stress on the hierarchical understanding of the church into the realm of her being a mystical body.<sup>1</sup> The church is "a perfect society which is superior to all other societies because of her divine calling," and can be termed "a communion of the faithful in Christ."<sup>2</sup> She can also be defined more specifically as "the mystical body of Christ,"<sup>3</sup> and is equated with the Roman church.<sup>4</sup> Hence, Rome is "the

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<sup>1</sup>Mystici Corporis (1943) is considered by many to be the one of the most significant pronouncements of Pius XII (1876-1958). It is also held as one of the most important clarifications on Roman Catholic ecclesiology in modern times (Fenton, "Pope," 407-408, 419, and Martin Hopkins, "St. Thomas and the Encyclical Mystici Corporis," Thomist 22 [1959]: 1). Its stated intent was to provide a clear understanding of the nature of the church (Mystici Corporis 14) and to correct certain errors which had made inroads into Roman Catholicism (Hopkins, 11-12). Contesting the idea that the church is invisible (Mystici Corporis 78-79; McGovern, 23; and Fenton, "Pope," 407-409), the encyclical merged the invisible and visible into one church, claiming that both are aspects of the same organism, a view advocated by both MÖhler and Satis Cognitum (Hopkins, 12). In Fenton's opinion ("Mystici Corporis," 448), this expression of the church as a mystical body is not merely a description of her but one of the classic definitions of the church. For the purposes of this study, we have used the English translation of Mystici Corporis as found in The Catholic Mind 41 (1943): 1-44. The Latin text can be found in Acta Apostolicae Sedis 35 (1943): 193-248.

<sup>2</sup>Paragraphs 76, 79, 83, 3, 65, 82, and McGovern, 25. Notice the use of the language of the schema on the church of Vatican Council I, which defined the church in terms of a societas perfecta (Supremi Pastoris 27, 31).

<sup>3</sup>Paragraphs 32, 73, and, Fenton, "Mystici Corporis," 449. Pius XII seems to be dependent here on Aquinas, who uses the terms church and mystical body interchangeably. But he differs from Aquinas in a significant way. For Aquinas, the mystical body is seen in terms of the internal bond (or invisible element) whereas Pius XII designates membership in terms of the external bond (or visible element) (see Hopkins, 4-7).

<sup>4</sup>Paragraphs 6, 107, 121. See also Hopkins, 23; and, Fenton, "Pope," 409-410. That this is the intent of Mystici Corporis is confirmed by a later encyclical of Pius XII, Humani Generis, which states: "Some say they are not bound by the doctrine, explained in our Encyclical letter of a few years ago [Mystici Corporis] and based on the sources of Revelation, which teaches that the Mystical Body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church are one and the same thing. . . . These and like errors, it is clear, have crept in among certain of our sons who are deceived by imprudent zeal for souls or by false science." (C.1. For the English text of the encyclical, see The Catholic Mind 48 [1950]: 688-700. The Latin text can be found in Acta Apostolicae Sedis 42 [1950]: 562-578).

mother and mistress of all churches, the new Eve, and the mother of all of the living."<sup>1</sup>

As the "mother of all the living," the Roman Catholic Church embraces the whole human race without exception. Her function is to work for the upbuilding and increase of the body of Christ. In virtue of the juridical mission that Christ gave to the Apostles and thus to the church, she must "baptize and teach so that men and women may become members of her body." She perpetuates the saving work of redemption on earth because she is the mystical body of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

*Vatican Council II (1962-1965)*

While Mystici Corporis more fully developed the thinking of Möhler's view of the church as a mystical body, its thought was further explained and expanded by Vatican Council II.<sup>3</sup> In the view of the Second Vatican Council, the church is "an organization of government and authority, i.e., a societas perfecta."<sup>4</sup> This society is not bound to any particular human culture or political ideology but encompasses all

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<sup>1</sup>Paragraphs 81, 3, 25, 35, 105, 108, 124, 129. In connection with the mystical body, the church is considered to be militant.

<sup>2</sup>Paragraphs 67, 79, 113, and 117.

<sup>3</sup>For a history of the Council, see Robert B. Kaiser, Pope, Council and World (New York: Macmillan, 1963); Michael Novak, The Open Church (New York: Macmillan, 1964); Antoine Wenger, Vatican II, 4 vols. (Paris: Éditions du Centurion, 1963-1966); Xavier Rynne, Vatican Council II (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1968); and Henri Fesquet, The Drama of Vatican II (New York: Random House, 1967). That the doctrine of the church was important can be seen by the number of commentaries on the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. See, for example, "The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," in Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, 5 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 1: 105-307; Kloppenburg, 12-63, 97-123; Austin Flannery, ed., Vatican II on the Church (Dublin: Scepter Books, 1967), 22-61, 131-135; Kevin McNamara, ed., Vatican II: The Constitution on the Church (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1968, 75-362; and Anthony Lee, ed., Vatican II: The Theological Dimension (N.p.: Thomist Press, 1963), 1-58. When quoting the documents of Vatican II, this study utilizes Documents of Vatican II, ed. by W. Abbot (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966).

<sup>4</sup>Lumen Gentium 8, and Christopher Hollis, The Achievements of Vatican II (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1967), 71.

of human life,<sup>1</sup> since salvation for all was accomplished by Jesus Christ who has established His Kingdom on earth, i.e., the church.<sup>2</sup> In light of this fact, the church is "a sacred, religious, and incarnational reality" within the framework of human society. Hence, she is the "people of the new covenant who have been gathered by the Apostles through the power of the Holy Spirit."<sup>3</sup> This implies that the church must be seen as a *koinonia* of men and women, the head and foundation of which is the Lord, who entrusted her to his successor, Peter.<sup>4</sup> The essence of the church was now described as a communion of

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<sup>1</sup>Gaudium et Spes 42 and Ad Gentes Divinitus 8.

<sup>2</sup>Lumen Gentium 3; Gaudium et Spes 40; Ecclesiam Suam 38; and, Stephen Blenko, "The Kingdom of God in the Documents of Vatican II," in Gottesreich und Menschenreich, ed. Ernst Staehelin (Basel: Helbing and Lichtenahm, 1969), 573. Thus, the church is both human and divine, present in this world but not at home in it (Sacrosanctum Concilium 2).

<sup>3</sup>Unitatus Redintegratio 2. The emphasis on the church as the "pilgrim people of God" was a further elaboration which went beyond both Möhler and Mystici Corporis. It accents the church as God's people of the new covenant, and connects her with God's people of the Old Testament (Kloppenbug, 43-44). It also stresses the divine element of the church by calling attention to the life of grace which all receive from Christ her head, which in effect complements the concept of the body of Christ by highlighting the historical and social aspects which belong to the church (Kevin McNamara, "The People of God," in Vatican II, ed. McNamara, 103-104).

<sup>4</sup>Lumen Gentium 19, 8. Avery Dulles ("The Church, the Churches, and the Catholic Church," Theological Studies 33 [1972]: 216-218) explains that "The Council asserts not that the Catholic Church is in every respect perfect, but that it possesses all the essential structures which pertain to the constitution of the Church of Christ. In making this claim, the Council assumes, or implies, that the papal-episcopal form of government, the distinctive trait of Roman Catholicism, is of divine institution. The divine institution of the papacy and the episcopate is indeed a cardinal tenet of Vatican Councils I and II." See also George Tavard in The Pilgrim Church (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 61.

One must keep in mind the much debated and disputed statement of Lumen Gentium (8) which reads as follows; "This Church, constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists [instead of the original esse--is] in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in union with that successor, although many elements of sanctification and of truth can be found outside of her visible structure." Much has been made of this change from esse to substitutio. A. A. Vogel's view is that this change might be considered "the most significant word choice of the whole Council, which leaves 'theological space' for other churches" ("The Second Vatican Council on the Nature of the Church and Ecumenism," Anglican Theological Review 49 [1967]: 245). Schillebeeckx concurs when he writes, "Without

new covenant believers and a mystical body which is connected with both the church of the New Testament as well as that of the Old Testament through the hierarchy.

In regard to the church's function, Vatican Council II reaffirms the idea that the church is a sign to all the world that Jesus Christ still stands in our midst. Being established by Jesus Christ, "she is his one faithful spouse."<sup>1</sup> She belongs to the mystery of God in the time between Christ's ascension and his parousia since it is through the visible church that grace is given to man, that Christ's victory and His saving presence are recognized.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the church alone can offer salvation to all men.<sup>3</sup> The church's mission is "to expand herself by establishing local congregations in all places under a shepherd who is loyal to and in communion with the church of Rome."<sup>4</sup>

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abandoning her religious convictions that Christ's church as the apostolic fulness is essential for salvation, the Roman Catholic Church in this Council has officially given up her monopoly of the Christian religion or of Christianity" (The Real Achievement of Vatican II, trans. J. J. Vaughan [New York: Herder and Herder, 1967], 66-67). On the other hand, Christopher Butler, another Catholic theologian, sees the matter in a different light. He states: "to affirm that the Church, existing on earth as a structured society, is the Catholic Church, was changed so to state, instead, that the Church subsists in the Catholic Church. The Council did not, and could not, make such a surrender. The claim to unicity is absolutely basic to Catholicism . . . (the underlying conviction is something about which we [Catholics] cannot bargain; and no one, not even a Catholic, should be required to surrender his profoundest article of faith in the interest of dialogue)" (In the Light of the Council [London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1968], 88).

<sup>1</sup>Unitatis Redintegratio 1; Gaudium et Spes 43; and Lumen Gentium 6.

<sup>2</sup>C. Moeller, "History of Lumen Gentium's Structure and Ideas," in Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal, ed. J. Miller (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 127.

<sup>3</sup>This is true of both those inside and outside the church. The church has the responsibility to teach both her children and all people in the way of salvation (Gravissimum Educationis 3 and Ad Gentes 7).

<sup>4</sup>Ad Gentes 27, and 6 refer to the task of the church as the planting of the church where she has not yet taken root. That the priests as representatives of the church are to fulfill this mission with the laity praying for more priests to be able to be sent out again supports the idea of the function of the church as a plantatio ecclesiae (see, for example, Christus Dominus 6; Presbyterorum Ordinis 11, and Ad

## Summary

The image of the body of Christ is the foundational model used in Roman Catholic ecclesiology to describe the nature of the church. It has been interpreted in two different but related ways, as a hierarchy and as a mystical body. The former begins by defining the church as a structure and then relates that understanding to the body of Christ. The latter applies its view of the body to the church's structure. In light of both, the church's function is considered to be a plantatio ecclesia. With this in mind, let us now turn our attention to the second model describing the church's essence, i.e., the Reformed understanding of the church as communio sanctorum.

The Reformed Tradition: The Church as  
a Communio Sanctorum

Luther reemphasized the view of the church as a communio sanctorum in an attempt to refute Eck's hierarchical understanding of her which the latter had expressed in the debate at Leipzig (1519). This perspective had a significant effect upon Protestant ecclesiology, and thus we need to briefly discuss Luther's stance on the subject before turning our attention to Calvin and the Reformed tradition.

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

Luther held that the church was first and foremost the communion and "fellowship of the saints," i.e., a communio sanctorum, in which all are called to be priests and to offer spiritual sacrifices to God.<sup>1</sup> She cannot be tied to one person or place, but can only be

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Gentes 38). For further study on the concept of mission at Vatican II, see J. Schütte, ed., L'Activité missionnaire de l'Église (Paris: Le Cerf, 1967); Ronan Hoffman, "The Council and the Missions," in Lee, ed., Vatican II, 537-550; Kloppenburg, 97-123; and J. M. Tillard, "L'Église de Dieu est une communion," Irénikon 53 (1980): 451-468.

<sup>1</sup>"Papacy in Rome," 1: 211-216, and The Large Catechism (1529), in The Book of Concord, trans. and ed. T. G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 2.3.51-52 (417); Bruce Shelley, Church History in Plain Language (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1982), 259; and, Robert Fife, The Revolt of Martin Luther (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957),



conceived as "the total number of believers in Christ, scattered throughout the world."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the true church was invisible. His focus on the invisible church hidden with Christ was developed over against Eck's view of the church as being hierarchical, visible, and residing at Rome. The true church, for Luther, exists "without embodiment in an historical situation and without an outward form."<sup>2</sup> She is "drawn together by the Holy Spirit through the Word" and derives her being from Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Luther's view of the church as a communio sanctorum led him to stress the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers.<sup>4</sup> All

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361. Luther's view was not something that the Reformer developed at Leipzig (1519). As early as his lectures on the Psalms (1512-1515), he was already cultivating this view of the church. See for example his commentary on Psalms 91:7 where he states: "The Church of Christ has a side according to which it is in the flesh, but its right is its spirit. . . . With the heart the church is in heaven and . . . with the flesh it is in the world." (First Lectures on the Psalms, II, Psalms 76-126, in Luther's Works, ed. H. C. Oswald [St. Louis: Concordia, 1976], 11: 221). He actually uses the term in his commentary on Psalm 101:7 (ibid., 11: 292). See also H. Bornkamm, Luther's World of Thought, trans. Martin Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965), 143 and Scott Hendrix, Ecclesia in Via, in Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, vol. 8, ed. Heiko Oberman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974). As a result, Luther spent much time attempting to establish that the Roman Catholic Church was not to have supremacy over all the churches ("Disputation and Defense of Brother Martin Luther against the Accusations of Dr. Johann Eck," LW 31: 318). As proof, Luther cited the fact that the Greek and the Oriental Churches had never been under Rome's control.

<sup>1</sup>Large Catechism 2.3.51-52.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Luther, "Papacy in Rome," 1: 212-215, and Jay, 162-165.

<sup>3</sup>"Papacy in Rome," 1: 211; Large Catechism 2.3.42-52; E. G. Schweibert, Luther and His Times (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 417; and, Scott Hendrix, Luther and the Papacy [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981], 82). Luther saw the church in terms of her actual people rather than as a great juridical institution (T. F. Torrance, Kingdom and Church [Fair Lawn, New Jersey: Essential Books, 1956], 57).

<sup>4</sup>One may be surprised by the lack of missionary thrust that seems to be inherent in the understanding of the church as a communio sanctorum. Reasons for this can be found in Herbert Kane, Understanding Christian Missions (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 139-144, and Avis, Theology, 171-174). This is not to say, however, that the Reformers showed no concern for mission (ibid., 174-177). The ministry of the word belonged to all and to bind and loose was nothing more than to proclaim and apply the gospel so that all might be saved (ibid., 99).

believers have "the right and duty to spread the gospel" and could incur the displeasure of God and the loss of their soul if this is not carried out. By the right preaching of the word which results from the brotherly love created in persons when they are converted, the heathen can hear the gospel message of justification by faith. By responding to the message, they too can become a part of the "advancing Kingdom of God."<sup>1</sup> Yet, they must hear that message from a witnessing believer and a witnessing church. In this sense, the communio sanctorum sees the mission of the church as always moving outward like the ripples on the pond, always on the attack, always going forth to preach the Word. It is interested in saving individual souls for incorporation into the invisible church.<sup>2</sup>

*John Calvin (1509-1564)*

Since her foundation is election, the church for Calvin<sup>3</sup> is "the totality of the true elect, whether they are dead or alive."<sup>4</sup> She

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<sup>1</sup>Luther, "That a Christian Assembly or Congregation has the Right and Power to Judge all Teachings and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scriptures," in LW 39:310, and Avis, Theology, 178-179.

<sup>2</sup>Verkuy1, 176.

<sup>3</sup>Calvin developed his theology in the context of his dialogue with Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism of the sixteenth century (Hans Hillerbrand, Men and Ideas in the Sixteenth Century [Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969], 71-73). In those days, two forms of Christianity began to take shape, which were opposed to each other, i.e., Roman Catholicism and the Reformed tradition (G. S. Walker, "Calvin and the Church," in Readings in Calvin's Theology, ed. D. K. McKim [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984], 230). That Calvin was greatly interested in the church is hardly a matter of doubt. (J. T. McNeill, "The Church in Sixteenth-Century Reformed Theology," Journal of Religion 22 [1942]: 259). Fully one-third of the Institutes of The Christian Religion in their final form (1559 ed., ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles, in The Library of Christian Classics, ed. by John Baille, John McNeill, and Henry van Dusen, vols. 20 and 21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977) were devoted to the doctrine of the church (J. S. Whale, The Protestant Tradition [Cambridge: The University Press, 1955], 145).

<sup>4</sup>Institutes 4.1.2, and 4.12.9. See also Wendel, 294 and Wilhelm Niesel, The Theology of Calvin, trans. H. Knight (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 189. This idea is especially clear in the 1536 edition of the Institutes (1.72-74). See Institutes of the Christian Religion (1536), trans. and ann. by Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids:

is the "communion of the faithful who are predestined to and endued with eternal life."<sup>1</sup> It is in this context that Calvin defines the church as the communio sanctorum.<sup>2</sup> As a communion, the church must be a living organism. This makes her "the body of Christ which is made up of all believers," i.e., individuals knit together by Christ into a single unified entity.<sup>3</sup> The church, in this regard, consists of Christ as her head and his people.<sup>4</sup> She encompasses both clergy and laity.<sup>5</sup>

Her purpose is to "be an instrument for our vocation and come to the aid of our sanctification."<sup>6</sup> Hence, the church, in her essence,

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Eerdmans, 1986).

<sup>1</sup>Institutes, 4.12.5; Wendel, 293; and Walker, 218.

<sup>2</sup>Institutes 4.16.3-4. Before deciding on the use of the term communio sanctorum, Calvin had earlier used other expressions such as numerus electorum or praedestinatorum and coetus fidelium for the church, particularly in the 1536 edition of the Institutes. These show that Calvin held that the church was the church of the elect and had faith in God. Later, he settled for the expression communio sanctorum as a more comprehensive term (see McNeill, 259; B. A. Gerrish, "John Calvin," in Reformers in Profile, ed. B. A. Gerrish [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967], 161; Whale, 146-152; and François Wendel, Calvin, trans. P. Mairet [London: William Collins Sons, 1960], 297-310). Calvin differs from Luther's view on the communio sanctorum in that he stresses the institution of the church as God's primary instrument for transforming humans and the world according to his purpose whereas Luther sees the church's institution as necessary but secondary to God's radical judgment on the world (John Tonkin, The Church and the Secular Order in Reformation Thought [New York: Columbia University Press, 1971], 119). This may explain why Calvin continues to refer to the church as the mother of mankind (see, for example, Institutes 4.1.1-4).

<sup>3</sup>Institutes 4.8.11, 4.12.15.

<sup>4</sup>E. Gordon Rupp, "John Calvin," in A History of Christian Doctrine, ed. Hubert Cunliffe-Jones (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 397.

<sup>5</sup>Institutes 4.12.1, 4.12.7, and Wendel, 294.

<sup>6</sup>Institutes 4.1.7-9, and Wendel, 292. It is helpful at this juncture to mention the role of discipline as a "mark" of the church in Calvin's thought. One cannot help to notice that for all of the emphasis that he places upon discipline, Calvin refrains from making it one of the marks of the true church. It was viewed as a means of sanctification and as such belonged to the organization of the church and not her essence (see Wendel, 301). Walker (226) on the other hand, holds that discipline was a third mark of the church because of the importance attached to it by Calvin. It seems that here Walker may be interpreting Calvin through the eyes of the Belgic Confession (1561)

is holy both in the corporate and personal senses, holiness being defined in terms of ridding both the individual and the church of sin.<sup>1</sup> This is a process that will be continually ongoing until the consummation.<sup>2</sup> On this basis, Calvin makes a distinction between the visible and invisible church. For him, the visible, external church is explicitly affirmed to be part of the true invisible church.<sup>3</sup> The invisible, however, is not identical in its empirical reality with the body of Christ because reprobates persist in the visible church while the invisible remains pure.<sup>4</sup>

Since the church is visible, her mission, as Calvin perceives it, is entrusted to believers that they might communicate salvation to others.<sup>5</sup> It is through the visible local church that one comes in

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which certainly went further than Calvin regarding discipline as a mark of the church.

<sup>1</sup>Institutes 4.1.17, and Wendel, 301.

<sup>2</sup>Institutes, 4.12.5, and McNeill, 262.

<sup>3</sup>Institutes 4.2.11, and Hillerbrand, 192.

<sup>4</sup>Institutes 4.1.16; Niesel, 192; and Wendel, 297. This does not mean that the ungodly destroy the church. They cannot, for Christ protects her from destruction. The relationship of the two churches might best be described as two aspects of one church considered to be concentric circles. The two cannot be taken as separate entities, but must be held together since Christ is the head of both (Institutes 4.3.16, and Whale, 158).

<sup>5</sup>Institutes 4.3.1. It is difficult to ignore a "strange silence" of the Reformers regarding missions. Even Calvin's commentary on Matthew 28 (the Great Commission Text) is written from a polemical anti-Roman perspective rather than exhorting Christians to a sense of mission (Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke, trans. William Pringle, 3 vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949], 3:383-387). Still, we would concur with Avis (167-179) that missions were not entirely neglected by the Reformers in spite of the many obstacles they faced at the beginning of the Reformation (Avis, Theology, lists these on pp. 171-174). At the same time, Calvin himself held that the sending forth of missionaries or evangelists was not a normal part of the church because the offices of evangelist, prophet, and apostles were extraordinary, and as such, had been fulfilled by the preaching of the apostles in NT times (Institutes 4.3.4).

contact with the invisible church.<sup>1</sup> There is, therefore, the church's responsibility through her ministers and members to spread the gospel, for in this witness they are extending the kingdom of God and reaching the elect who must hear it.<sup>2</sup> Here one can see that the mission of the church to reach the predestined elect is a direct result of Calvin's understanding of the church as a numerus electorum or communio sanctorum.<sup>3</sup>

*The Belgic Confession (1561)*

The Belgic Confession, in the Calvinistic tradition, stresses catholicity as one of the attributes of the true church.<sup>4</sup> Since the body of Christ is catholic, its unity must be emphasized. The church is

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<sup>1</sup>Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, trans. John Pringle, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 2:77-78.

<sup>2</sup>Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 1:47-49.

<sup>3</sup>Thus, Rupp (397) has pointed out that the ministry of the church in Calvin's understanding is based upon his view of her nature.

<sup>4</sup>Belgic Confession 27, and Henry Beets, The Reformed Confession; A Popular Commentary and Textbook on the Netherland or Belgic Confession (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1929), 208-209. There is a difference between an attribute and a mark for the Confession. An attribute or quality has to do with the church in her true and invisible character. It is of the essence of the church. The marks of the church refer to the church's visible manifestation (Belgic Confession 27, 29, and Beets, 208-219). While the Belgic Confession accepts the marks of the church as held by Calvin, the church is found where the pure doctrine is preached and the sacraments are rightly administered (Belgic Confession 29, and R. Recker, "An Analysis of the Belgic Confession As to Its Mission Focus," Calvin Theological Journal 7 [1972]: 169), it also goes one step further in stating that discipline is also a mark of the true visible church (Belgic Confession 29).

The Belgic Confession is one of the oldest doctrinal standards of the Dutch Reformed tradition (Beets, 7-10). It was written by Guido de Brès (1523-1567) in 1561 and was adopted along with the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) in its final form by the Synod of Dort (1619), thus becoming a standard for the Dutch Reformed tradition (Arthur C. Cochrane, Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966], 185-188, and Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions [Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1988], 78). Chapters 27-35 of the Confession deal with ecclesiology. The version of the Belgic Confession referred to in this study is found in Philip Schaff, trans., The Creeds of Christendom, 3 vols. (New York: Harper Brothers, 1919 [4th ed.]), 3:383-436. This version provides the text in English translated from the Latin and the original French text.

one because of her Head, Christ, and forms one body in Him. All true believers are members of this body.<sup>1</sup> The church is made up of all people in all ages who profess the true religion.<sup>2</sup> It is the Lord's own planting and bringing together of like-minded brethren and sisters.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the church is "une sainte congrégation et assemblée des vrais fidèles Chrétiens [sic]," i.e., a communio sanctorum and an assembly of true Christian believers who find salvation in Christ by faith.<sup>4</sup>

While the Confession is primarily concerned with making doctrinal statements on various theological points of contention such as the scope of the canon, papal authority, church tradition, revelation, election, the freedom of the will, and salvation by grace, which were important to its day, it does hint at what it holds the mission of the church to be.<sup>5</sup> It underlines the fact that the church is called holy

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<sup>1</sup>According to the Confession, this is one of the great essentials of the church's faith (Belgic Confession 27, 28, and Beets, 208). Recker (170) points out that two basic guidelines mark the true fellowship and oneness of believers: (1) all things must be managed by the Word and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only head of the church, and (2) Christ is the head of the church and not the bishop of Rome. The Confession, however, according to Recker, does recognize a pluriform church. The church is one within a variety of forms, these forms being described by the word "congregation."

<sup>2</sup>Belgic Confession 28, and Beets, 206. Rooted in Calvin, the Reformed tradition used to distinguish between two uses of the term "universal church." The invisible universal church includes the elect of all ages and the visible universal church is the totality of believers on this earth at the time of the writing of the Confession. This distinction between the visible and invisible church does not denote two churches or two different bodies but two aspects of the one body of Christ (Beets, 206-207).

<sup>3</sup>Belgic Confession 29, and Beets 213-218.

<sup>4</sup>Belgic Confession 27.

<sup>5</sup>Recker, 180. The Confession was primarily drawn up to refute Roman Catholic doctrine. Yet, it also had in mind the Anabaptists, Lutherans, Epicureans, Pelagians, Muslims, Zwinglians, and heretics such as Marcion. Thus, it speaks within a narrow concrete historical situation and, as such, has a limited purpose, explains Recker (159).

because she is "set aside" by God and for God.<sup>1</sup> Thus, her primary function is to bring the body of Christ to the world so that the latter might have the opportunity to join the church.<sup>2</sup>

*The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)*

The Heidelberg Catechism was an attempt by Frederick III the Pious (1517-1576) to reconcile the doctrinal divergences between Lutherans and Calvinists in the Palatinate of Germany.<sup>3</sup> In this document, the church is the community founded by the Son of God chosen by him for eternal life and consists of those who profess faith in Jesus

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<sup>1</sup>Belgic Confession 27, 29, and Beets, 208. Holiness is both corporate and individual, but the idea of being set apart seems to be most important here. This appears to be the beginning of a trend of defining the church in terms of her mission, i.e., as being set apart for God's work of spreading the gospel.

<sup>2</sup>This must be drawn out by implication from the general duty of Christians to love the true God and their neighbors ("aimant le vrai Dieu et leurs prochains") mentioned in article 29 (see also Recker, 170, and Beets, 215). This idea of loving God and one's neighbor evolved and unfolded throughout the Reformed tradition.

<sup>3</sup>R. V. Schnucker, "Heidelberg Catechism (1563)," in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 504. The Heidelberg Catechism was for centuries, and to some extent still remains, the textbook of German, Dutch, Hungarian, and Swiss Reformed Christians (Karl Barth, The Heidelberg Catechism for Today, trans. S. C. Guthrie [London: Epworth Press, 1964], 24, and Fred Klooster, "Missions - The Heidelberg Catechism and Calvin," Calvin Theological Journal 7 [1972]: 181-182). It is generally recognized to be a modified or moderate form of Calvinism as opposed to what is termed "high Calvinism" (George W. Richards, The Heidelberg Catechism [Philadelphia: Publication and Sunday School Board of the Reformed Church in the United States, 1913], 98). The Catechism is considered to be the most ecumenical of the Reformed confessions. It is primarily irenic in nature, with the notable exception of question 80 (Alan Miller and M. E. Osterhaven, "Heidelberg Catechism 1563-1963," Theology Today 19 [1962-1963]: 536). It was subsequently translated into many languages and became one of the most popular of the Reformed statements of faith. The Reformed theological perspective can be seen in its doctrine of the sacraments, particularly in its view of the Eucharist, in the centrality of Scripture as authority, in good works as a response to divine grace, and in the church as the true source of Christian discipline. The Lutheran positions can be most clearly seen in the authority of Scripture and in its understanding of man's sinful condition (ibid.). The English and German texts of the Catechism can be found in Philip Schaff, trans., "The Heidelberg Catechism A.D. 1563," in The Creeds of Christendom, 3:307-355.

Christ as their Saviour.<sup>1</sup> She is comprised of the totality of the elect, who, although not always members of the visible church, become such before they die.<sup>2</sup> Thus, she is described as the communio sanctorum. In her, there is equal participation in all of the promises of the gospel, a common possession of Christ and his benefits, and the bestowment of gifts given to each member of the church.<sup>3</sup>

The most explicit reference to the church's function in the Heidelberg Catechism appears in question 86.<sup>4</sup> In answer to the question as to why we do good works appears the answer,

Because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, renews us also by his Holy Spirit after his own image, that with our whole life we may show ourselves thankful to God for his blessing, and that he may be glorified through us; then, also, that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by the fruits thereof, and by our Godly walk may win our neighbors also to Christ."

One of the functions of the community, then, is to have fellowship with Christ for the purpose of sharing him with those around us.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Questions 54, 55, 19. See also Barth, 86, 135.

<sup>2</sup>Zacharias Ursinus, Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, trans. G. W. Williard (Columbus, Ohio: Scott and Bascom, 1852), 292-293. Ursinus emphasized this point in order to refute the idea that the universal church is embodied in the church of Rome.

<sup>3</sup>Question 55; Ursinias, 286, 293, 304; and Barth, 87.

<sup>4</sup>Klooster points out that Question 54 ("What do you believe concerning the holy, catholic Christian church? That the Son of God, through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith. Of this community I am and always will be a living member") does seem to emphasize the Missio Dei, both domestic and foreign ("Missions," 199). However, he also "acknowledges that the Heidelberg Catechism has only one explicit reference to missions [i.e., Question 86]" (ibid., 197). The Heidelberg Catechism does not precisely, in fact, deal with the function of the church (ibid., 181-182). As in the case of the Belgic Confession, its implications for the Catechism's understanding of the mission of the church can be drawn without much difficulty.

<sup>5</sup>See Barth, Catechism, 27-28, and Hoeksema, 69.



*The Canons of Dort (1618-1619)*

The Synod of Dort was called by the States General of the Netherlands to deal with certain ecclesiastical and doctrinal matters which had been troubling the Reformed Church in that part of the world.<sup>1</sup> For the Canons, the church is composed of "the regenerate who have been called by the Holy Spirit."<sup>2</sup> Since she encompasses the "people who have faith in Christ as their Saviour," i.e., those who have been explicitly called to election, the church can be defined as "the society or communion of the elect."<sup>3</sup> This society of the elect is to herald the gospel of grace, without differentiation or discrimination, to all nations and peoples to whom God in his good pleasure has chosen

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<sup>1</sup>The three major problems that the Synod dealt with were the control of the church by the state, an anticonfessional humanism, and Arminianism. See M. E. Osterhaven, "Dort, Synod of (1618-1619)," in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 331-332. The Canons of the Synod of Dort are one of the classical formulations of Reformed doctrine and are maintained by a significant number of Dutch Reformed believers (M. W. Dewar, "The British Delegation at the Synod of Dort - 1618-1619," Evangelical Quarterly 46 [1974]: 103). They set the standard for High Calvinism for many generations. The main affirmation of the Canons is that grace is wholly divine and not by human merit, thus dealing with salvation rather than the doctrine of the church, although the latter is not absent from the concern of their authors. The Canons of Dort can be found in Peter Hall, trans., "The Synod of Dort," in The Harmony of Protestant Confessions, by Peter Hall (London: John F. Shaw, 1842), 539-573. For the Latin text, see Philip Schaff, Creeds of Christendom, 3: 550-597. For a more modern translation of the Canons, see Anthony Hoekema, "A New English Translation of the Canons of Dort," Calvin Theological Journal 3 (1968): 133-161, or "The Canons of Dort," in Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1988): 122-145. The former does not include the Preface, Rejection of Errors, Conclusion, the Approbation, but limits itself to the actual text of the Canons, whereas the latter includes all of the forementioned.

<sup>2</sup>Canons 5.1. See also Fred H. Klooster, "The Doctrinal Deliverances of Dort," in Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort, 1618-1619, ed. P. De Jong (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 64.

<sup>3</sup>Canons 5.9; 2.9; and 3-4.8. See also Anthony Hoekema, "The Missionary Focus of the Canons of Dort," Calvin Theological Journal 7 (1974): 218, and Klooster, "Deliverances," 68-70. For the author of the Canons, election is the only way to join the church.

to send the gospel.<sup>1</sup> While frankly admitting and acknowledging the doctrine of limited atonement, the Canons of Dort still hold that this view does not in any way curtail the universal preaching of the gospel. On the contrary, they underline the urgency and responsibility of believers to preach the gospel to others, inferring mission from the understanding of the nature of the church as the communion of the elect.<sup>2</sup>

*Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)*

Abraham Kuyper was both a Dutch statesman and an influential theologian.<sup>3</sup> At the foundation of his theology is his concern for the doctrine of the church.<sup>4</sup> For him, the church has "existed from

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<sup>1</sup>Although it is not the primary focus of the Canons, the missionary task of the church appears in various statements and finds its most significant expression in the text of Canon 2.5 which reads as follows: "Furthermore it is the promise of the Gospel, that whosoever believes in Christ crucified, should not perish, but have life everlasting; which promise, together with the injunction of repentance and faith, ought promiscuously, and without distinction, to be declared and published to all men and people, to whom God in his good pleasure sends the Gospel." Another implicit reference to the mission of the church can be found in in Canon 1.3 where it is stated that "God in mercy sends preachers of this most joyful message, to whom he will, and when he will; by whose ministry, men are called unto repentance and faith." For further study on the mission focus of the Canons, see Hoekema, "Missionary Focus," 209-220.

<sup>2</sup>See Klooster, "Deliverances," 76.

<sup>3</sup>I. Hexham, "Kuyper, Abraham (1837-1920)," in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 616. In 1880, Kuyper founded the Free University of Amsterdam, and six years later, he led a secession movement from the state church (Hervormde Kerk) to form the Gereformeerde Kerk. For an extended discussion of these events and their significance, see Frank Vanden Berg, Abraham Kuyper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 101-114, 128-161. For Kuyper's theological milieu, consult S. J. Ridderbos, De Theologische Cultuurbeschouwing van Abraham Kuyper (Kampen: Kok, 1947). As the founder of the Gereformeerde Kerk to which Berkouwer belongs, Kuyper's influence has profoundly affected the thought of that denomination as well as that of Berkouwer himself.

<sup>4</sup>Henry Zwaanstra, "Abraham Kuyper's Conception of the Church," Calvin Theological Journal 9 (1974): 149-153. Even Kuyper's dissertation was concerned with a comparative study of John Calvin and Joannis à Lasco's conceptions of the church (Abraham Kuyper, Disquisitio Historico-Theologia, Exhibens Johannis Calvini et Joannis à Lasco de Ecclesia Sententiarum Inter se Compositionem [Hague: M. Nyhoff, 1862]).

eternity and will endure forever."<sup>1</sup> It is a "spiritual organism" that includes both heaven and earth, having its "starting point and center in heaven."<sup>2</sup> Election is the foundation of the church, the latter being defined as the totality of the elect which cannot be gathered on this earth.<sup>3</sup>

As far as the mission of the church is concerned, all believers, if they are true members of the church, must be active in working for their neighbors.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, the church is an "army whose task it is to establish the Kingdom of God." Kuyper stresses the church as missionary in her function and her outlook because she is ecumenical in her nature, destined to embrace all inhabitants and not confined to national churches.<sup>5</sup> Thus, her purpose is to "unite the many small lights of individual believers into the one church," that

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<sup>1</sup>Abraham Kuyper, Lectures on Calvinism, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 68-69 and idem, The Implications of Public Confession, 3rd ed., trans. H. Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1934), 83. Zwaanstra (157-160) reminds us that for Kuyper, the word "church" expresses only her mode of existence and not her essence.

<sup>2</sup>Lectures, 59-62, Implications, 82-84, Principles of Sacred Theology, trans. H. De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 590, and Zwaanstra, 158, 174. For further study, see Donald McKim, "Reformed Perspective on the Mission of the Church in Society," Reformed World 38 (1985): 408. Organism, in this sense, means that the whole precedes the parts (Zwaanstra, 156). Kuyper further refined this and spoke of the church in terms of essence (the perfect church which is only found in heaven) and existence (the concrete form of the church on this earth which was a mixture of both saved and reprobate). See his Lectures, 61. This led Kuyper to draw a distinction between the church as institution (the earthly visible church) and as organism (invisible church). The visible church is the concrete form of the invisible organism (Zwaanstra, 160).

<sup>3</sup>Lectures 61-65, and Zwaanstra, 155-156. This explains why the church is also defined as the communio sanctorum. She is found in confessing individuals themselves taken together as a group of elect called from eternity by God. The church is elected as a totality, individuals being parts of the whole. These, of course, are adult members incorporated into Christ (Lectures, 63). Thus, the church only comes into being as a fruit of election and regeneration because the church is a function immanent in God and included in his decree.

<sup>4</sup>Implications, 85-87.

<sup>5</sup>Lectures, 65-68; Implications, 85; Principles, 589-590; and, Zwaanstra, 178.

oneness proceeding from conversion which occurs when the gospel is preached in the world.<sup>1</sup> The function of the church in Kuyper's ecclesiology clearly flows from his understanding of her essence as the body of the elect.

*Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)*

Bavinck, along with Kuyper, was a leading theologian of the Neo-Calvinist revival initiated in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands. He served as professor of systematic theology at both Kampen (1882-1902) and the Free University of Amsterdam (1902-1920).<sup>2</sup> In Bavinck's estimation, the church is "the gathering of all believers of all times who confess or have confessed Jesus as Lord and have been elected by him."<sup>3</sup> She encompasses "the great multitude of the elect from all ages who are unified in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and who have Christ as their head."

There can be no believer or gathering of believers, however, if the church does not fulfill her mission to the world. The purpose of election, therefore, is "to create a body on earth which encompasses

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<sup>1</sup>Lectures, 66. All can become members of the church whether elected or not because the visible concrete church comprises both the elect and the reprobate (ibid., 61).

<sup>2</sup>During his tenure at Kampen, Bavinck completed his major and most influential work, Gereformeerde Dogmatiek, 4 vols. (Kampen: Kok, 1895-1901); J. Van Engen, "Bavinck, Herman (1854-1921), in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 129. His primary concern was to make Scripture speak to his age. In his view, Roman Catholicism was a degeneration of the Christian faith. Thus, much of his work polemicizes against the Roman Catholic Church, even though he was greatly affected by Plato, Augustine, and Aquinas (Cornelius Van Til, "Bavinck as Theologian: A Review Article," Westminster Theological Journal 24 [1961]: 48-49). See also R. H. Bremmer, Herman Bavinck als Dogmaticus (Kampen: Kok, 1961), and W. Hendriksen, "Translator's Preface," in Herman Bavinck, The Doctrine of God, trans. W. Hendriksen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 5-7.

<sup>3</sup>Herman Bavinck, Our Reasonable Faith, trans. H. Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 519-523, 529. The true church consists only of true believers in Jesus Christ. See also Herman Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace," in Calvin and the Reformation, ed. W. Armstrong (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1909), 107.

many and various members and which gives to all believers their own name, place, and function as well as their calling within the whole."<sup>1</sup> The function of the church is to bring the gospel to all creatures, which helps her to "reproduce herself from generation to generation while she daily loses those who, through death, are transferred to the triumphant church."<sup>2</sup>

#### Summary

From the Reformation to the beginning of the twentieth century, the concept of the church as a communio sanctorum has followed a relatively consistent pattern of development in Reformed thinking. Usually, the church is described as the communion of the elect called by God through Christ to redemption. Her mission results from one's understanding of her nature and finds culmination in the proclamation of the gospel so the full number of elect might enter into her community or koinonia. In the twentieth century, however, Neo-orthodoxy and its primary proponent, Karl Barth, called into question the traditional understanding of the relationship of the essence and the function of the communio sanctorum.

#### Karl Barth (1886-1968): The Communio Sanctorum as Witness-Being

Karl Barth is unquestionably one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> A Neo-orthodox and an exponent

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<sup>1</sup>Reasonable Faith, 514-515. Organism, as used by Bavinck, means that the church is unified everywhere by true doctrine. It does not refer to the same church which exists through the centuries (ibid., 522). This organism is the product of God's redemption, renewal, and glorification of regenerated mankind. It has a two-fold purpose: that of proclaiming the excellencies of God to others and that of making certain that its members bear God's name in their foreheads. Thus the church has both an external and internal mission.

<sup>2</sup>Reasonable Faith, 522, 528-534, and "Calvin," 107.

<sup>3</sup>Jay, 351. For biographical information on Karl Barth, see Clifford Green, Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom, in The Making of Modern Theology, ed. John De Gruchy (London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1989), 11-45; Eberhard Jüngel, Karl Barth: A Theological

of Calvin, he, too, viewed the church as a communio sanctorum and exercised a significant influence on Berkouwer. While an advocate of the church as a communio sanctorum, Barth brought to Protestant ecclesiology a dimension which leads him beyond the traditional Reformed understanding of the communion of saints.<sup>1</sup>

The source and criterion of the church's identity for Barth is Jesus Christ, God's revelation, "who was before the foundation of the world, the electing God and the elected man, by whom and in whom the world has been redeemed."<sup>2</sup> The church, in turn, is a divinely instituted community differentiated from all other communities by the fact that Christ, as the electing God and elected man, is her basis for existence.<sup>3</sup> The church is "an assembly which exists in response to the

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Legacy, trans. Garrett Paul (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 16-52; Markus Barth, "My Father: Karl Barth," in How Karl Barth Changed My Mind (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 1-5; Eberhard Busch, Karl Barth, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976); Georges Casalis, Portrait of Karl Barth, trans. Robert McAfee Brown (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1963), 40-82; and David Mueller, Karl Barth (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1972), 13-48.

<sup>1</sup>There is some discussion about Barth's doctrinal development, including that of his view of the church, i.e., an earlier and a later or mature view as it is termed by Green (21). See, for example, Jay, 352-353 and Thomas Torrance, Karl Barth: An Introduction to His early Theology, 1910-1931 (London: SCM Press, 1962), 112-124, 190-197, 201-216; and Colin O'Grady, The Church in the Theology of Karl Barth (Washington, D.C.: Corpus Books, 1968), 7-60 (earlier view), and 61-350 (later view). It is Barth's mature views on the church which have exercised their influence upon Berkouwer. We, therefore, concentrate upon these. When quoting Church Dogmatics, we refer to the version ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957).

<sup>2</sup>Theology and Church, trans. Louise P. Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 276-281. See also Waldron Scott, Karl Barth's Theology of Mission (Downer's Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1978), 42. This understanding of the relation between election and ecclesiology has in no small way affected Berkouwer's view of election and the church. See chapter 3, pp. 109-116 below.

<sup>3</sup>Barth prefers the term community to the word "church" because theology confronts the Word in a concrete community and not in the "empty space" of the church as an institution (Evangelical Theology: An Introduction, trans. Grover Foley [New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963], 37). See also The Faith of the Church, ed. Jean-Louis Leuba and trans. Gabriel Vahanian (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), 135; Karl Barth, Credo, trans. J. S. McNab (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), 143; and idem, Against the Stream, trans. E. M. Delacour and Stanley Godman (London: Camelot Press, 1954), 76-79; and Elizabeth

call of the electing Christ and whose purpose is to gather men and women into a fellowship."<sup>1</sup>

This *koinonia*, in Barth's opinion, has four basic elements. It is a body distinct from the person of Christ, it has no autonomous existence as it is dependent on the Word, it exists only through the Word rather than through a natural brotherhood, and it has spatio-temporal existence as the soma Christou.<sup>2</sup> This is what Barth means when he describes the church as the communio sanctorum.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, this communio sanctorum can only be the true church as the risen Lord is present and acting in and through her members by the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> For Barth, this connection of the church with the Holy Spirit

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Barnes, "Theological Method and Ecclesiology: A Study of Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Church," Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1984, 113-114. The Sein of the church in this sense for Barth is identical with the Sein of Christ (Hubert Hartwell, The Theology of Karl Barth [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964], 142, and O'Grady, 259).

<sup>1</sup>O'Grady, 250-251, and CD I.1.18. Personal faith here takes precedence over the church's structure because it is the task of the community to obey in faith the message of the biblical witness (Carl Starkloff, The Office of Proclamation in the Theology of Karl Barth [Ottawa, Ontario: University of Ottawa Press, 1969], 16, and Hartwell, 539). This implies that the church is both a visible historical institution and an invisible spiritual communion. Both are to be seen together (Community, State, and Church [Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960], 149-150; CD IV, 3, 2: 722-723; and O'Grady, 254-255).

<sup>2</sup>CD I, 2: 214-223, and Starkloff, 24. In this sense, the church is considered by Barth to be the earthly-historical form of Christ (Jay, 355-356). What Barth attempts to emphasize is the fact that the risen Christ has two forms, a heavenly and an earthly (O'Grady, 258-259). Besides, since the church was elected prior to the individual, the community has precedence over the individual. In other words, the believer is first and foremost a member of the Christian community and secondly an individual Christian (CD, IV, 1: 705-706, and Hartwell, 145-146). There is, therefore, no private Christianity for Barth (CD IV, 1:685, and Jay, 357-358).

<sup>3</sup>On earth, the communio is a fellowship of confession, thanksgiving and gratitude, of patience leading to conversion, it is a community of prayer, of concern for the world, of service to one another, of hope and prophecy; it is a fellowship of the proclamation of the gospel, and a fellowship of worship (CD IV, 2: 643; Theology, 38; and Community, 150. See also Green, 117).

<sup>4</sup>Credo, 139-142, and The Knowledge of God and the Service of God according to the Teaching of the Reformation, trans J. M. Haire and Ian Henderson (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939), 157. See also Hartwell, 144, and E. Barnes, 110. Notice that the Holy Spirit and

emphasizes the fact that the church is not constantly and continuously the church but rather that she is "a discontinuous series of faith-events where men, women, and the congregation are gathered together to be witnesses of the living Lord."<sup>1</sup> This faith-event occurs when the church sees herself as the culmination of the expectation of the revelation of Israel, i.e., the definitive revelation in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Since the community is the historical realization of the faith-event gathered to be a witness, the church is "holy" in the sense that she is "set apart for a special task."<sup>3</sup> The very *raison d'être* of the church's existence is her mission, i.e., the church stands and falls with it. She is sent into the world by Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit to confess Christ before all people, thereby making known to all the covenant which was put into effect by Christ between God and man.<sup>4</sup> This mission is "not something the church has decided to do on her own, but a task that has been handed to her."<sup>5</sup> The active life of the church, then, is based upon the life of Christ who came to finish the Father's work--the very task to which Christ called his disciples with the utmost urgency. Thus, the Christian community exists for the

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mankind become co-involved in the actualization of the church herself and in her work and mission. In this way anthropology is effectively used as one of the foundations of ecclesiology, an idea that had no small effect on Berkouwer.

<sup>1</sup>CD IV.1: 650, 643; CD I, 1: 299; CD I, 2: 80; Theology and Church, 284-285; Stream, 66-69; Hartwell, 536; and Starkhoff, 18-23.

<sup>2</sup>CD I, 2: 299.

<sup>3</sup>See, for instance, Theology and Church, 275, and Faith of the Church, 137-138.

<sup>4</sup>CD IV, 3: 780-783, and Hartwell, 146-147. The church can only exist as a missionary community as she is continually enlightened, called, sent, and goes forth to preach the gospel to all humankind. In this way, the church is continually moving from God to the world and back again (O'Grady, 252). She has been given gifts to make possible the total and corporate participation of God's people in the ongoing Christian mission (Scott, 35).

<sup>5</sup>See CD I, 1: 61-62, and Starkloff, 15. In this vein, the church can be defined as a herald, one who receives an official message with a commission to pass it on (Dulles, Models of the Church, 71).



world with the special task of proclaiming the Word of God to it. "The purpose of her task is her ministry and the sole concern of the elect is the ministry of reconciliation. Their function as the elect is precisely this service to Christ."<sup>1</sup> Service, for Barth, is one of "self-renewal by the beckoning of new members to the community by summoning non-Christians to listen to the call of faith."<sup>2</sup>

The call to mission or the church's outward horizontal expansion, however, is only possible because that task is first and foremost "a spiritual, vertical one," the spiritual providing the foundation for the historical outward movement of the church.<sup>3</sup> It is only in this way that the church can truly fulfill her purpose for she cannot understand and hear the gospel's voice without exerting herself to win new witnesses.<sup>4</sup> The goal of mission for Barth is "to make that task superfluous by the establishment of new missions carried on by former heathen." Thus, for Barth, the missionary objective is not so much to convert the heathen in the sense of increasing their personal enjoyment of salvation but rather "to affirm to them that God has called them to be witnesses and to equip them as such."<sup>5</sup> In short, the church is God's community for the world because the church alone knows the world as it is addressed by God and joined to him in covenant. She is the fellowship which practices solidarity with the world by proclaiming

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<sup>1</sup>CD I, 2: 417; CD II, 2: 425-426; CD, IV, 2: 830-833; and Starkloff, 30-32.

<sup>2</sup>Credo, 145. See also Starkloff, 39-40. It is in this sense that those who are addressed by the gospel, including the Christian, are as such to be considered as godless heathen (O'Grady, 321).

<sup>3</sup>Knowledge, 150, and Theology and Church, 275-276.

<sup>4</sup>CD IV, 4: 646-647, and E. Barnes, 118.

<sup>5</sup>CD IV, 3, b: 876, and Scott, 24-40. Baptism for Barth, then, becomes a commitment of the baptized to further witness (ibid., 32).

in its midst God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ so the world may know him and become like him.<sup>1</sup>

In summary, the church is a herald, the gathered community formed around the Word and whose mission is to preach and proclaim the Word.<sup>2</sup> She is not an institution but a particular people set apart by God for a special task, that of service to God, to fellow-believers, and to those outside the church.<sup>3</sup> As the earthly-historical form of Jesus' existence, she can be defined as the community of those who have been elected by and in him as his witnesses and, as such, are a "provisional representation" of the justification accomplished in Jesus Christ for the whole world.<sup>4</sup> She is not the servant of the state nor the patron of the arts, but a commissioned community, a missionary community, an expansion of the original core group of the twelve.<sup>5</sup> The primary bond of this herald model is the faith response to the gospel, which is the proclamation of the Christ-event that ceaselessly summons the church to repentance and reform.<sup>6</sup>

It is obvious that Barth has interpreted the communio sanctorum in a manner that makes her witness the center and criterion of the life of both the true church and the true Christian.<sup>7</sup> The identity of the church is found in her function as herald, of one who simply

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<sup>1</sup>CD IV, 3, 2: 775-777; Faith of the Church, 144-145; and E. Barnes, 124-125.

<sup>2</sup>Evangelical Theology, 37. See also Jay, 362, and Dulles, Models of the Church, 71.

<sup>3</sup>CD III, 4: 477-490, and Hartwell, 145.

<sup>4</sup>E. Barnes, 109-110.

<sup>5</sup>CD III, 4: 470, and Starkloff, 16-34.

<sup>6</sup>CD I, 1: 298-300, and Dulles, Models of the Church, 72-77. The gospel is the proclamation of an event and not propositional truths.

<sup>7</sup>CD IV, 3: preface xi-xii, 554-556.

announces what she has been ordered to proclaim.<sup>1</sup> Barth stresses the community's nature in terms of its function, i.e., as the proclaimer of the kerygma.<sup>2</sup> It is important here to mention the connection he has made between knowledge and witness and its impact on the church's nature and mission. In this view, indeed, the being (nature or essence) and the act (function) of the church cannot be separated. The church is the event which by the grace of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit must continually happen afresh.<sup>3</sup> She is the living community of the living Lord in the fulfillment of her existence. Thus, her act of proclaiming the gospel (her function) is her being, her essence is her witness.<sup>4</sup> This is Barth's contribution to the contemporary understanding of the communio sanctorum and its nature.

#### Conclusion

The issues involving the nature of the church, her function, and their mutual relationship were established at the time of the Reformation starting with the debate between Johann Eck and Martin Luther. From this major divergence of opinion, two major positions developed. Roman Catholicism primarily described the essence of the church in terms of a visible hierarchical structure. Protestantism, on the other hand, predominantly defined the essence of the church as a communio sanctorum, the communion of the saints.<sup>5</sup> The Catholic understanding of the church led to the concept of her mission as a plantatio ecclesiae, i.e., the reproduction, where she had not existed

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<sup>1</sup>CD I, 2: 797-798, and Starkloff, 15-25.

<sup>2</sup>Credo, 142-144, and Knowledge, 153-155. See also E. Barnes, 127-131. This in contradistinction to the Reformed tradition, however, which usually defined the nature of the church and then assigned to her functions based on that definition.

<sup>3</sup>Hartwell, 143-144.

<sup>4</sup>CD IV, 1: 650, and O'Grady, 251.

<sup>5</sup>Newbigin, 94.

before, of the pattern of the mother church.<sup>1</sup> Missionary activity was done for the purpose of bringing the heathen within the confines of the Roman Catholic Church, and into communion with Rome, i.e., the ecclesia vera.<sup>2</sup> The mission of the communio sanctorum, as understood by Protestants, was the proclamation of the gospel in order that individuals may be incorporated into the invisible church of the elect.<sup>3</sup> Still, for both Protestants and Roman Catholics, the function of the church sprang from their understanding of her essence.

In our own century, Karl Barth, to a certain extent, has shifted ecclesiology away from the traditional manner of considering the function of the church in light of what her essence is perceived to be. His interpretation of the communio sanctorum strongly emphasizes the church's witness about Christ, a witness viewed as the center and criterion of the true church and of her essence.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the church's act and being cannot be separated from each other. The essence (nature) of the church cannot be isolated from her function. The church must be considered from the perspective of her witness-being.

These are the major ecclesiological forces that, to various degrees, contributed to the shaping of Berkouwer's ecclesiology. Before reviewing his doctrine of the church as such, let us briefly consider the salient elements of Berkouwer's theology.

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<sup>1</sup>Scherer, 35.

<sup>2</sup>Aberly, 8, and Dulles, Models of the Church, 38.

<sup>3</sup>Verkuyl, 176.

<sup>4</sup>CD IV, 3: preface xi-xii, 554-556.

## CHAPTER 2

### G. C. BERKOUWER: THE THEOLOGIAN

As other theologians, Berkouwer has not been immune to the influences of his historical and theological context.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, an attempt is made to give that background for Berkouwer. We begin the study with a brief biographical sketch. We then turn our attention to some basic aspects of his methodology. Finally, we survey Berkouwer's foundational theological themes so that his ecclesiology may be understood from the overall perspective of his general theological scheme.<sup>2</sup>

#### Biographical Survey

##### Backgrounds

Gerrit Cornelius Berkouwer was born in 1903 in the Netherlands into a devout Reformed household, which linked him to Dutch Reformed Confessional theology.<sup>3</sup> While a young man, he decided to attend the

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<sup>1</sup>Riga, 565, and McBrien, Church, 8.

<sup>2</sup>This chapter does not aim to give an exhaustive study of Berkouwer's methodology or theology. What we are interested in is the background to his understanding of the nature of the church. For a more in-depth study of Berkouwer's theology and method, see for example, Lewis Smedes, "G. C. Berkouwer," in Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology, ed. P. E. Hughes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966); Robert Bryant Barnes, "The Concept of Revelation among Selected Twentieth-Century Theologians: James Orr, Edward J. Carnell, and G. C. Berkouwer," Th.D. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986; Carl Bogue, "Berkouwer: The Evolution of a Twentieth-Century Theologian," Journal of Christian Reconstruction 7 (Summer, 1980): 135; and J. C. De Moor, Towards a Biblically Theo-logical Method (Kampen: Kok, 1980).

<sup>3</sup>Smedes, "Berkouwer," 63.

Free University at Amsterdam.<sup>1</sup> His first love was mathematics, but he soon switched to theology because of the deep impression made upon him by the preachers in his home church in his younger years.

After graduating at the age of 24, Berkouwer was ordained and called to pastor a church in Oudehorn. He remained there five years before accepting a preaching appointment in Amsterdam in 1932. While there, he began work on and earned his doctoral degree cum laude in 1934 from the Free University, writing his dissertation on faith and revelation in the newer German theology under the guidance of Valentinus Hepp.<sup>2</sup> In 1945, Berkouwer was elected to succeed Hepp in the chair of Dogmatics at the Free University. In that same year, he became co-founder and editor of the Gereformeerd Weekblad, a responsibility he held until 1978. Concurrently, he also served as a contributing editor for the column "Current Religious Thought" in Christianity Today and wrote many articles for this periodical. On October 12, 1973, he retired as professor of theology from the faculty of the Free University

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<sup>1</sup>The Free University was one of the schools started and funded by the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, a church more conservative than the national church of Holland, the Hervormde Kerk. The Gereformeerde Kerken is the result of an amalgamation of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland and the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (Dolerende) which came about in 1892 because of a bitter struggle over the Confessions and the manner in which the Hervormde Kerk adhered to the Confessions (Nauta, 297-298). After World War II, the Gereformeerde Kerken broadened its views and entered the mainstream of theological scholarship under the leadership of Berkouwer and Herman Ridderbos, the NT scholar from Kampen. See John Riches, "Berkouwer on Common Grace," Theology 78 (1975): 302, and John Hesselink, "Contemporary Protestant Dutch Theology," Reformed Review 26 (1973): 72. For the differences between the Hervormde and Gereformeerde Kerken, see Otto De Jong, "De Kerk in een Neutrale Maatschappij," in Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis, 5 vols. (Nijkerk: G. F. Callenbach, 1972), 5: 320-425; H. Algra, Het Wonder van de 19e Eeuw (Franeker: T. Wever, 1966), 304-316; Spijker, 363-383; Nauta, 297-324; and A. Lindboom, Hervormde and Gereformeerde (Aalten: Uitgeverij de Graafschap, 1957).

<sup>2</sup>Barnes, 103. His dissertation was subsequently published under the title Geloof en Openbaring in de Nieuwere Duitse Theologie (Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon, 1932). It was in his dissertation that Berkouwer began a life-long interest in the writings of Karl Barth.

after serving the Gereformeerde Kerken in various capacities for over fifty years.<sup>1</sup>

### The Influence of Berkouwer

Berkouwer has been one of the most prominent and influential evangelical theologians of his time.<sup>2</sup> His international reputation has come about largely due to the fame of his writings on Karl Barth and Roman Catholicism as well as through his chief project entitled Studies in Dogmatics.<sup>3</sup> Berkouwer's book on Karl Barth, De Triomf der Genade in de Theologie van Karl Barth, is considered by far as one of the best Protestant books written on the theology of Barth.<sup>4</sup> This book was

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<sup>1</sup>H. C. Hoeksema, "A Critique of G. C. Berkouwer's Een Halve Eeuw Theologie, Chapter IV," Protestant Reformed Theological Journal 8 (October, 1974): 38.

<sup>2</sup>In the opinion of Carl Bogue, Berkouwer has had an extensive impact upon American Evangelicalism, where his influence has been both direct and indirect ("Berkouwer and the Battle for the Bible," in Inerrancy and the Church, ed. John Hannah [Chicago: Moody Press, 1984], 382). Furthermore, according to Bogue ("Battle," 381), from 1920-1970 Berkouwer achieved an international stature comparable to that which Bavinck and Kuyper had achieved before him. Dale Moody concurs with Bogue when he writes that "Berkouwer is among the best theological writers of our day, and the theological student who neglects him is not wise" (as quoted by John Hesselink, "Recent Developments," 46). See also M. E. Osterhaven, review of Divine Election, by G. C. Berkouwer, in Reformed Review 14 (December, 1960): 51. Hesselink, in "Dutch Theology" (78), has listed Berkouwer as one of the three most influential names in modern Dutch systematic theology, the other two being A. A. van Ruler and H. Berkhof. Berkouwer's name has also been linked with that of B. B. Warfield as one of the two most noted exponents of divergent views on the Bible. See Henry Krabbendam, "B. B. Warfield Vs. G. C. Berkouwer on Scripture," in Inerrancy, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 413. Alvin Baker, Berkouwer's Doctrine of Election: Balance or Imbalance? (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Press, 1981), 23, reminds us that Berkouwer's significance is not due to the fact that he is a radical innovator of theology. His theology, in many respects, represents a flowering of Dutch Reformed Theology.

<sup>3</sup>Hesselink, "Recent Developments," 45.

<sup>4</sup>(Kampen: Kok, 1954). (The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth). Even Karl Barth himself recognized Berkouwer's contribution to the understanding of his own theology. In the preface to Church Dogmatics, vol. 4, Part 2, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, xii, Barth writes, "I have to acknowledge this now that I have come to know the great book on myself and the Church Dogmatics by a representative of that group (Neo-Calvinists), G. C. Berkouwer (De Triomf der Genade in de Theologie van Karl Barth, 1954). For all of its reservations and criticisms, this work is written with such care and

largely responsible for bringing Berkouwer and his work into international prominence. At the same time, in his Conflict Met Rome, Berkouwer demonstrated his familiarity with the theological literature on the issues discussed and his insight into the fundamental differences between the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and those of the Reformation.<sup>1</sup> This familiarity with Roman Catholicism is also underlined in Berkouwer's Vatikaans Concilie en Nieuwere Theologie.<sup>2</sup>

The chief project of Berkouwer and that which has brought him the most fame is his Studies in Dogmatics, a series intended to bring

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good will and Christian aequitas that--in the hope there are others like its author--I should like to withdraw the entirely generalised and therefore unfounded words which after many years of provocation I then suddenly unleashed." Furthermore, in an extended footnote, Karl Barth praises Berkouwer for perceiving his intent, especially in regard to the christological basis of his theology (CD 4.3, 173-180).

<sup>1</sup>(Kampen: Kok, 1948). (The Conflict with Rome). It was on the basis of his "pioneering work" in the Rome-Reformation dialogue that Berkouwer was invited in 1962 by the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity to be an official observer at Vatican Council II (Eugene Bradford, review of The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Westminster Theological Journal 29 [1966]: 83). Berkouwer's invitation by Pope John XXIII is all the more remarkable since he belongs to a minority church in the small country of Holland. See Heiko Oberman, review of The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Christianity Today 9 (January 29, 1965): 40; Louis Berkhof, review of Conflict Met Rome, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Banner 83 (September 17, 1948): 1104; and, John Timmer, "G. C. Berkouwer: Theologian of Confrontation and Correlation," Reformed Journal 19 (1969): 17.

<sup>2</sup>(Kampen: Kok, 1964). (The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism). See also, Nicholas Monsma, Review of The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism, in Torch and Trumpet 15 (November 15, 1965): 15; Jack Rogers, Confessions of a Conservative Theologian (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974): 136-137; P. E. Hughes, review of The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism, by G. C. Berkouwer, In International Reformed Bulletin 9 (January-April, 1966), 53; and Fred Klooster, review of The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Calvin Theological Journal 1 (1966): 106. Even the Roman Catholic Henry St. John holds that Berkouwer is "accurate in learning and knowledge of modern trends in Roman Catholicism and demonstrates a deep understanding of Catholic positions and that this book (Second Vatican Council) should be helpful to Catholic theologians who are beginning to dialogue with Anglicans and Free Churchman on the theological level" (review of The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism, by G. C. Berkouwer, In One in Christ 2 [1966]: 31..



Dutch Reformed theology up to date.<sup>1</sup> The monographs were timed for publication every other year on a subject which appeared to be at the center of theological discussion at the time.<sup>2</sup> These studies have exhibited a strong influence upon evangelical theology, particularly in America.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>According to E. F. Klug, Berkouwer's work in dogmatics stands as one of the monumental achievements in the 20th century (review of The Church, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Concordia Theological Quarterly 41 [October, 1977]: 100). The editors of Christianity Today concur, adding that "Berkouwer has provided our generation with the most extensive theological effort in his dogmatic series next to Barth's Church Dogmatics" (see the editorial note beginning the article by Berkouwer, "Universalism," Christianity Today 13 May 1957, 5-6). Furthermore, in Hesselink's opinion, these volumes work out Berkouwer's theology over against the ecumenical and Reformed confessions and thus enter the realm of confessional theology ("Dutch Theology," 32).

<sup>2</sup>This explains why there is hardly any logical order to the set (Smedes, "Berkouwer," 64). See also Klaas Runia, "Recent Reformed Criticisms of the Canons," in Crisis in the Reformed Church, ed. Peter De Jong (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968): 172.

<sup>3</sup>The two most valuable aspects of Berkouwer's work in the opinion of Carl Bogue (Hole, 6) are his encyclopedic knowledge of church history and doctrinal disputes and the perception with which he defines the issues at hand. Both John Murray (review of Divine Election, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Westminster Theological Journal 23 [1960]: 39) and Lewis Johnston ("G. C. Berkouwer and the Doctrine of Original Sin," Bibliotheca Sacra 132 [1975]: 324) express appreciation for the way Berkouwer combines exegesis, biblical theology, historical theology, dogmatic theology, and knowledge of the languages in his dogmatic series. According to M. J. Geursen (review of Faith and Sanctification, In Reformed Theological Review 12 [1953]: 39) and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (review of Faith and Sanctification and The Providence of God, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Evangelical Quarterly 25 [1953]: 107), because they attempt to answer the question of what the message is that Christians are trying to proclaim and whether it is Biblical the monographs can be used by pastors and preachers, the books are seen not as textbooks but as discussions of current issues. However, not all see this series as particularly valuable. Some of Berkouwer's critics hold that it is too apologetic and not systematic enough, while others are unhappy about its confessional approach (Hesselink, "Dutch Theology," 32). Riches views the series as having neither the merit of being good handbooks for students because they are not in depth enough nor of illuminating the issues because of Berkouwer's "neo-Calvinist" biblicist way of dealing with them ("Common Grace," 303). Johnston criticizes Berkouwer for leaving believers wondering what they should believe. While he commends the series for wrestling with the vox theologica of the day, he contends that Berkouwer "has reached very few stable syntheses of theological truth" ("Original Sin," 326). It is quite evident that no matter which position one adopts, one cannot deny that the dogmatic series has been of great influence.

### Methodology

Berkouwer certainly recognizes that methodology plays an important role in theology. For example, he admits, "I [Berkouwer] do not mean to say that the question of method in dogmatics is not important. On the contrary, methodology has often exerted a real influence on the life of faith."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, he writes that "in the history of theology we time and time again discover clearly evident presuppositions that have decisively influenced theological thought. Consciously or unconsciously they have played an important role in molding theological conceptions."<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Berkouwer has not provided us with a prolegomenon which clearly delineates his theological method or his presuppositions. Therefore, we must determine these from an inductive study of his works.<sup>3</sup>

#### A Biblical/Confessional Theologian

Berkouwer's stature and influence, especially seen through his Dogmatic Series, is related to his desire to be a Biblical theologian.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Faith and Perseverance, trans. Robert Knudsen [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958], 61).

<sup>2</sup>Triumph of Grace, 19.

<sup>3</sup>John Bolt, "The Principle of Correlation in H. M. Kuitert's Theological Method," Calvin Theological Journal 14 (April, 1979): 7, n. 5. In regard to method, Berkouwer holds that his methodology is essentially Reformed and was employed by Calvin himself, though he does his dogmatics in the light of the period in which he lives (James Daane, review of The Sacraments, by G. C. Berkouwer, in The Reformed Journal 20 [December, 1970]: 20). This is important since Berkouwer holds that in every historical development of theology, one encounters a process of old and new, tradition and transformation. Tradition always plays a role and has implications for the present and the future. There is also an element of transformation which takes place. Thus, Berkouwer wishes to demonstrate that he both is in line with the Calvinism of the Dutch Reformed Church and a "transformer" of it (Church, 329).

<sup>4</sup>Daane, "Man," 25; Gerry E. Breshears, "Faith and General Revelation in the Tradition and Theology of G. C. Berkouwer," Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1984, 241; John De Waard, review of Faith and Sanctification, by G. C. Berkouwer, in Westminster Theological Journal 15 (1952): 59; and, Andrew Rule, review of Man: The Image of God, by G. C. Berkouwer, in Christianity Today, 26 October 1962, 42.

His characteristic way of doing theology is the Scriptural approach in which he insists on proper exegesis and stresses the "boundary" of Scripture as a control to be employed when doing dogmatics.<sup>1</sup> "In Dogmatic Theology," Berkouwer tells us, "we speak of our task as that of systematic reflection on the message of the Word of God." "Doctrine," therefore, "is an attempt to set forth the interrelatedness of the Word of God."<sup>2</sup> Theology is to be drawn out of Scriptural exegesis and must be able to relate itself to modern life while remaining connected with traditional dogmatic categories. To keep oneself connected with traditional dogmatic categories one must "diligently study the Confessions."<sup>3</sup> The latter, however, only "represent concentrated historical attempts to articulate faith as the church was listening to Scripture." Because their form is "time-conditioned," extended Confessions are vulnerable to defection from the truth. As human expressions of its truth, "they never can exhaust the wider meaning of the Scriptures."<sup>4</sup> Hence, "no dogmatic tradition can have the last word along side of Scripture since the church can never leave the impression

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<sup>1</sup>Holy Scripture, 213-239. See also De Moor, 283. Even the need for theological study stems from the nature of God's Word. The Word, for Berkouwer, comes not only as the vox Dei but through the vox humana. Thus, the preacher must continually study the Word to make it relevant to the times ("Current Religious Thought," 22 December 1961, 39).

<sup>2</sup>"Satan and the Demons," Christianity Today, 5 June 1961, 18.

<sup>3</sup>"The Küng-Rahner Debate," Christianity Today, 7 May 1971, 46; "Thought, 22 December 1961," 39; "Current Religious Thought," Christianity Today, 31 July 1964, 48; "Hearing," 64; "The Authority of Scripture: A Responsible Confession," in Jerusalem and Athens, ed. E. R. Geehan (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1971), 198-201; "Changing Climate," 16; and Holy Scripture, 213-239. See also Richard Muller, review of The Church, by G. C. Berkouwer, in Westminster Theological Journal 39 (1977): 398, and Johnston, "Original Sin," 322.

<sup>4</sup>"Authority," 203. See also Smedes, "Berkouwer," 67 and Breshears, 280-281. Periodically, Confessions need reinterpretation in light of new times (Church, 290. See also Cornelius Van Til, The Sovereignty of Grace. An Appraisal of G. C. Berkouwer's View of Dordt [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1969], 34).

that the last word on Scripture has been spoken."<sup>1</sup> Their most important purpose is to guide the church in her preaching of the Word.<sup>2</sup> One of the tasks of the theologian, therefore, is to collect the various utterances of the Confessions of the church and demonstrate their agreement with Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

Berkouwer's insistence on being a Biblical and confessional theologian enabled him to stress that Christianity is a dynamic message, a message to be proclaimed, something that is of central importance for the life of humanity and which brings inestimable blessings to this life. For him, the theologian is the servant of a listening, proclaiming, and believing church.<sup>4</sup> To accomplish this, Berkouwer takes a fideistic approach to both Scripture and Confessions.

#### The Role of Faith

Faith, in Berkouwer's thought, is vital for one's understanding of theology in general and more specifically for one's view of the church.

One must always remember that the entire message of the Scriptures is inseparably bound up with the living correlation between faith and God's grace. The Scriptures never reason about certainties and stabilities that can be abstracted from faith. . . . This reality of the church is . . . a reality of faith. . . . The reality, the faith-reality of the Church appears in this, that the believers look for all of their salvation to Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Thought," 24 May 1963, 40.

<sup>2</sup>Half-Century, 240, and Smedes, "Berkouwer," 63.

<sup>3</sup>"Thought, 24 May 1963, and Church, 289-303. See also Riches, "Common Grace," 303.

<sup>4</sup>"Thought, 22 December 1961," 39. See also Smedes, "Berkouwer," 69, and Charles Cameron, "The Reformation Continues: A Study in Twentieth Century Reformed Theology," Reformed Review 33 (1980): 79-80.

<sup>5</sup>Perseverance, 107-109. (Ter beantwoording van deze vragen zal men altijd weer moeten bedenken, dat al het speken der Schrift onlosmakelijk samenhangt met de aard der levende correlatie tussen het geloof en de genade Gods. Nimmer wordt geredeneerd over zekerheden en duurzaamheden, die van dit geloof zouden kunnen worden geabstraheerd. . . . Deze realiteit van de gemente . . . is echter een «zijn», een werkelijkheid van geheel eigen qualiteit [note the original stresses the

Faith enables humans to remain open to a living relationship with God.<sup>1</sup> One therefore, must not attempt to lock up the eternal truth of God into one's own logical and rational systems. Rather, Scripture and the confessions can only be understood through the exercise of a child-like faith.<sup>2</sup> The believer can confess theology as one's personal faith and while the church proclaims it as the faith of the gospel.<sup>3</sup> One's belief in God, indeed, is not dependent upon the soundness of human reason or on science but on sola fide. In this sense, Christian faith is a "subjective conviction much on the same plane as other earnest

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faith reality of the church as a 'reality of its own complete (unique) quality'-AT]. Het gaat om de werkelijkheid des geloöfs. . . . Daarin komt de werkelijkheid, de geloofswerkelijkheid der kerk uit, dat de gelovigen al hun zaligheid verwachten in Jesus Christus [DE 96-98]]. Again, we read (Justification, 200), "Only in faith can we transcend the entanglement which has so often dimmed the light of divine salvation in the history of the church (Alleen in dit geloof komt men boven de verwarring uit, die in de geschiedenis van kerk en theologie [notice the addition of "and theology" in the original] zo menigmaal het light des heils heeft vertroebeld [DE 214]). See also "The Temptation of Relativism," Christianity Today, 14 October 1957, 5.

<sup>1</sup>Justification, 21-22. In this respect, a Roman Catholic A. F. Carrillo de Albornoz holds that Berkouwer, in The Second Vatican Council, has shown that theology, even in the most technical and dogmatic sense, can be brought to bear upon the life of the church and her members (review of The Second Vatican Council and The New Catholicism, by G. C. Berkouwer, in Church and State 9 (1957): 129. Theology's task, therefore, is not to reason out the mysteries of faith, nor does it stand above faith. It can only bow before its mysteries. For Berkouwer, one is not to address oneself to a logical synthesis that can be framed in finished propositions, thus ending the matter, but serve the church and deal with the difficult problems that she has to address ("Thought," 4 March 1957, 40 and Justification, 160). See also The Providence of God, trans. Lewis Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 31, 253.

<sup>2</sup>R. Barnes, 133. Bogue ("Battle," 411), however, criticizes Berkouwer for placing revelation in the Kantian "noumenal" realm where logic is not applicable and thus all theology must be done in faith. This, Bogue holds, leads Berkouwer into the realm of subjectivism, something Berkouwer himself tries to avoid. Everything seems to be tested by one's own experience, with every man doing what is right in his own eyes.

<sup>3</sup>Smedes, "Berkouwer," 66. See also Berkouwer, "Current Religious Thought," Christianity Today, 4 July 1960, 40.

convictions."<sup>1</sup> The neglect of the element of faith in theology has led theology, in Berkouwer's opinion, to trade confession for logical systems. As a result, a lifeless orthodoxy has taken the place of a living message of hope.

#### Correlation

The same emphasis upon faith as the foundation for theology has also profoundly affected another presupposition of Berkouwer's theology, i.e., correlation.<sup>2</sup> Correlation appears to be one of the basic principles in Berkouwer's theology.<sup>3</sup> It can be defined as any theological method characterized by a conscious concern for the relation between various key components of the Christian faith such as God, Scripture, Christian dogma, faith or religion, all of which are to be

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<sup>1</sup>"Relativism," 5; "Thought, 13 April 1962," 56; Perseverance, 97, 199; Justification, 200, 21-22; Half-Century, 216; and Providence, 31, 253. See also Daane, "Man," 46 and Smedes, "Berkouwer," 65.

<sup>2</sup>One of the fundamental methodological questions of Berkouwer's theological career deals with the relationship of faith and revelation (Breshears, 216-217). Breshears holds that this was the problem Berkouwer dealt with in his dissertation. While there can hardly be any doubt about the importance of this question, especially for Berkouwer's earlier years, in the opinion of the author of this study there is another fundamental question that takes precedence in the later thinking of Berkouwer, that of the unity of the church and ecumenism in the light of her mission. This becomes apparent in the section on dialogue in the present chapter and in the next chapter, which discusses Berkouwer's understanding of the nature of the church.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Hesselink, "Recent Developments," 45; Hesselink, "Dutch Theology," 82; Bogue, A Hole, 10, 14; Carl Kromminga, review of The Church, by G. C. Berkouwer, in Calvin Theological Journal 12 (1977): 207; Timmer, "Theologian," 18; and Bolt, "Principle," 6, where the author holds that H. Kuitert adopted Berkouwer's method of correlation because he regarded it as a significant contribution to Reformed methodology. My purpose here is to see how it informs Berkouwer's understanding of the nature of the church. I do not deal here with all of the subtleties of this method. For a detailed discussion of the principle and Berkouwer's use of it, see De Moor, Biblically Theological Method; Hendrikus Berkhof, "De Methode van Berkouwers Theologie," in Ex Auditu Verbi: Theologische Opstellen Aangeboden aan Prof. D. G. C. Berkouwer ter Gelegenheid van Zijn Vijfentwintigjarig Ambtsjubileum als Hoogleeraar in de Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid van de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, ed. R. Schippers, G. Meuleman, J. Baker, and H. Kuitert (Kampen: Kok, 1965), 37-55; Gerard de Jong, De Theologie van Dr. G. C. Berkouwer. Een Strukturele Analyse (Kampen: Kok, 1971); and John Timmer, 17-22.

perceived by faith.<sup>1</sup> Berkouwer recognizes that "the term is naturally open to abuse; it could be construed as a relation in which both sides are mutually dependent and reciprocally effective . . . but this sense destroys the true relationship between faith and justification. The correlation of which we speak involves a relationship that is unique, sui generis and which must ultimately remain mysterious."<sup>2</sup> For him, however, correlation does not imply interdependence as in Tillich's case. "When I use the word 'correlation'," writes he, "[I use it] entirely free from the 'interdependence' problem of Tillich and in the sense of the mutual involvement of faith and revelation on the way of faith."<sup>3</sup> It indicates a mutual relation of faith, revelation and justification in which faith is dependent on revelation and justification while revelation and justification are not dependent on faith. Thus, "the Reformed concept of correlation is altogether contrary to mutual interdependence, rather it acknowledges the sovereign promise of God which founds the whole correlation and which is acknowledged by faith. Faith thus holds fast to the signs (sacraments) and it rests on the Word of promise."<sup>4</sup>

Correlation is a knowing "in faith" in contrast to the logic, system, and speculative knowledge of the non-believer.<sup>5</sup> It is a deeper

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<sup>1</sup>Bolt, "Principle," 5.

<sup>2</sup>Justification 178.

<sup>3</sup>Holy Scripture, 120, note 42. (Ik wees daar reeds op in mijn: *Geloof en Openbaring in de nieuwere Duitse theologie*, 1932, pag. 222, toen ik het woord «correlatie» hanteerde, geheel los van «interdependence»-problematiek van Tillich en de zin van het op elkaar betrokken zijn van geloof en openbaring in de weg des geloofs [DE 1: 165]). For Tillich's use of correlation, see Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 1: 59-66.

<sup>4</sup>Sacraments, trans. Hugo Bekker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 81-82.

<sup>5</sup>Hendrik Krabbendam points out that Berkouwer shows an unalterable opposition to ontological definitions when dealing with the nature of things. This approach leads to an intellectual grasp of things which should be accepted by faith ("The Functional Approach of G.

knowing that sees more clearly and avoids the contradictions within the speculative realm. Its function is to bring people into a living relationship with Christ.<sup>1</sup> Correlation motivates theology to live within the realm of faith and forces theology to work in creative response to the Word. Its concern is to present Christ as Savior in order that all may be brought to a saving knowledge of him.<sup>2</sup> The stress on the correlation of faith to revelation, for instance, leads Berkouwer to emphasize the purpose or function of theology rather than its rational aspects.<sup>3</sup> Traditional metaphysical ways of thinking are seen as being in conflict with the central categories of the Christian message because "metaphysics deal with the noetic and esoteric aspect of faith rather than with its reality and function."<sup>4</sup>

As a result, Berkouwer has moved in two directions. First, his use of a method of correlation has caused, in his case, a decisive shift in his view of Scripture. He no longer stresses Scripture as an

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C. Berkouwer," in Challenges to Inerrancy, ed. Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 307-308). See also Daane, Sacraments, 19. From the very beginning, it seems, Berkouwer sensed intuitively that only a full acknowledgement of what Scripture reveals and faith perceives enables theology to do justice to both divine objectivity and human subjectivity (De Moor, Method, 282).

<sup>1</sup>General Revelation, trans. Eerdmans Press staff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 88, 285; Holy Scripture, 351, 263; and, "Revelation: The Christian View, Part 3," Christianity Today, 10 November 1958, 18. See also Bogue, Hole, 12.

<sup>2</sup>Lewis, "Categories," 255.

<sup>3</sup>Smedes, "Berkouwer," 66. As a result, all theology is relative. Relative, here, means relative to the Word and not relative in that it changes with the historical times. Thus, Berkouwer tends to remove the Bible from the philosophical arena and to place it in a functionally-oriented position with faith as an a priori condition for accepting Scriptural authority (Barnes, 135).

<sup>4</sup>G. C. Berkouwer, General Revelation, 251; Gordon Lewis, "Categories in Collision?" in Perspectives in Evangelical Theology, ed. Kenneth Kantzer and Stanley Gundry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 251-252; Jack Rogers, "A Third Alternative: Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation in the Theology of G. C. Berkouwer," in Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation, ed. W. W. Gasque and William LaSor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 75; and Harry Boer, review of The Providence of God, by G. C. Berkouwer, in Westminster Theological Journal 15 (1952), 61.



infallible revelation of propositional truth but emphasizes the message of Scripture, the accent being upon the life-transforming message of the Word in the believer.

When we think of this expansive power of the gospel, our attention is not first of all drawn to a written book but to the proclamation of salvation as it appeared through messengers. The progress of the gospel becomes visible in earthly human relationships through missionary journeys intended to reach specific human lives with the message of salvation.<sup>1</sup>

Second, and as a corollary to the former, the correlation approach leads Berkouwer to focus on the function of the church, i.e., her mission of proclaiming Christ (which is the message of Scripture) to humans so that they may accept him and become members of the church.<sup>2</sup> These emphases in Berkouwer's method of correlation are not unrelated to his other important methodological principle, that of dialogue.

#### Dialogue

The rise of ecumenism exercised a significant influence in Dutch Reformed theology after World War II. It was intimately connected with issues concerning the catholicity of the church, the church and its relationship to the world, secularism, and the meaning of history, all of which soon appeared on the agendas of the churches in dialogue. This new situation had a considerable impact on Berkouwer who found himself involved almost continuously in the theological dialogue.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Holy Scripture, 327. See also Sproul, 243-244; Louis Praamsma, review of De Heilige Schrift, by G. C. Berkouwer, in Torch and Trumpet 17 (March, 1967), 15; Bogue, "Battle," 391-392; and Breshears, 458-462. Breshears goes so far as to say that "Berkouwer has at times fallen prey to the danger of his theological method and allowed his correlation of faith and revelation to limit the biblical data in an unwarranted fashion" (458).

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Church, 391-420 and Holy Scripture, 327-345. See also Klug, "Church," 101, and Mathai Zachariah, review of The Church, in Indian Journal of Theology 28 (1979): 189. This, incidentally, causes Berkouwer to downplay reflection on the ontological dimensions of the church.

<sup>3</sup>Muller holds that Berkouwer's book The Church is a remarkable example of his trend toward greater dialogue with contemporary theology ("Church," 397). See also Hesselink, "Dutch Theology," 74-78, and Smedes, "Berkouwer," 65. In this volume on the

For Berkouwer, to dialogue means to listen to each other's points of view.<sup>1</sup> True dialogue can only take place where there is honesty and one meets others on their own platform, never using them as a foil for his own assertions nor striking out at the weaknesses in their armor.<sup>2</sup> To dialogue is to examine differences and clear away misconceptions in order to facilitate understanding.<sup>3</sup> This is accomplished by bringing scholarly resources to bear on the issues at hand, while at the same time learning from others.<sup>4</sup> While this may not promise any immediate progress, it will accomplish a great deal in the long run, particularly in the case of the painstaking dialogues between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.<sup>5</sup> From this vantage point, the

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church, he has actively sought out dialogue with Roman Catholics and schismatics that appeared in his own denomination as has been underlined by Eugene Heideman ("Church," 64). As is seen shortly, Berkouwer's dialogues with Karl Barth, Neo-Protestantism, and Roman Catholicism caused shifts in his understanding of certain issues that would have no small effect upon his view of the nature of the church.

<sup>1</sup>Ralph Vunderink, review of Verontrusting en Verantwoordelijkheid, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Banner 31 July 1970, 24. The word "dialogue" suggests to Berkouwer that those who enter it have something to learn from each other, that a new listening as well as talking is needed (G. C. Berkouwer, "The Protestant-Catholic Dialogue: A Reformed View," Christianity Today, 23 October 1964, 6-7).

<sup>2</sup>Cornelius Dyck, review of The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Mennonite Quarterly Review 41 (1967): 169.

<sup>3</sup>For example, see Second Vatican Council, where Berkouwer presents and evaluates what he terms the "new" directions of Roman Catholic theology in this manner, and, Triumph, where he presents Karl Barth's view of the triumph of grace in the best light possible. Berkouwer consistently presents the opposing arguments in his dialogue (Alvin Baker, 43-44). This has become his trademark. He places the various views in their historical context, and then attempts to discover which ones are most consistent with the preaching of grace. Thus, the criticism of particular points of difference are presented in carefully worded arguments that are rarely offensive. (Simon Kistemaker, review of De Heilige Schrift, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Torch and Trumpet 18 [February, 1968]: 8). Henry St. John ("Council," 91-92) holds that Berkouwer is content with exposing the problems without giving final solutions but suggesting lines of approach to the issues.

<sup>4</sup>Rogers, Confessions, 143-144.

<sup>5</sup>John Kromminga, "The Protestant Approach to Roman Catholicism," Reformed Review 14 (1960): 16-17.

church's dialogue ultimately concerns itself with the positivity of the message that God has entrusted to the church rather than with its negative aspects.<sup>1</sup> Since the proclamation of the message of Scripture seeks to reach modern man, it is impossible to avoid dialogue. One cannot, in our times, speak from the perspective of monologue.<sup>2</sup>

Dialogue, for Berkouwer, has primarily expressed itself in three directions of interest: towards Karl Barth and his view of salvation, Liberal Protestantism and its view of Scripture, and Roman Catholicism and its ecclesiology.<sup>3</sup> Our interest here is how these dialogues have contributed to shape Berkouwer's theological positions, more particularly his ecclesiology.

#### *Karl Barth and Salvation*

In his early years, Berkouwer objected to Barth's view that there is no revelation apart from the special revelation of God in Christ.<sup>4</sup> Although he believes that Barth seeks to emphasize the

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<sup>1</sup>Church, 417. This, to be sure, runs the risk of leading to the lowest common denominator unity where differences are minimalized. Thus, Philip Hughes has blamed Berkouwer for suppressing his critical faculty to an undue degree which, in his opinion, has led Berkouwer to blur the differences between Rome and the Reformation ("Council," 54). Bogue shares this fear when he writes that Berkouwer has become more and more comfortable within the circles of neoorthodoxy and liberal Roman Catholicism, while there is strain between him and his own denomination ("Battle," 410). He goes on to state that Berkouwer's commitment to a confessional church seems to give him great empathy toward Roman Catholicism, which wishes to change while holding on to its heritage (*ibid.*, 394-395).

<sup>2</sup>Church, 415, 227-231, and Second Vatican Council, 99-112. See also Riches, "Common Grace," 308.

<sup>3</sup>Berkouwer himself refers to these influences as the "problems raised by dialectical theology, the renewed discussions between Rome and Reformed theologians, and the so-called Luther Renaissance" (Justification, 10). See also Barnes, 104-105; Breshears, 214-215; and, Fred Klooster, review of Modern Uncertainty and Christian Faith, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Westminster Theological Journal 17 (1954): 98.

<sup>4</sup>"Thought," 4 July 1960, 40. Barth is considered by Daane ("Man," 25) to be the most formidable challenge to Reformed theology in this century. Berkouwer too recognizes this when in 1957, he stated that for more than thirty years, Barth has dominated the field of dogmatic theology ("Thought," 4 March 1957, 39). Few if any Reformed theologians have so concerned themselves so constantly or fully with

absoluteness and non-repeatable nature of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, Berkouwer criticizes Barth's position for leading to "an unavoidable Christomonistic theology."<sup>1</sup> Barth, according to Berkouwer, confuses the noetic and ontic aspects of the problem of knowledge. In Berkouwer's view, this implies that the revelation of God cannot be known either through his works or his law. Hence, for the Swiss theologian, there is no general or natural revelation. It is only through Christ, i.e., special revelation, that we can know God.<sup>2</sup> For Berkouwer, there is both general and special revelation. General revelation leads humans to God but only as it is understood through the looking-glass of special revelation.<sup>3</sup>

Berkouwer's objection to Barth's understanding of revelation impelled him to react to Barth's view of Christ as the mirror of election. Barth's view is that Christ is both electing God and elected man. Christ is the primeval object of the Father's election. In him, humanity is summoned to election, and through him the individual is summoned to his/her private relationship with God.<sup>4</sup> In Berkouwer's

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Barth as did Berkouwer. (Cornelius Van Til, The Triumph of Grace: Studies in the Heidelberg Catechism [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Press, 1958], 81). Some of the works produced by Berkouwer on Barth are Geloof en Openbaring, 1932; Karl Barth (Kampen: Kok, 1937); Barthianisme en Katholicisme (Kampen: Kok, 1940); Karl Barth en de Kinderkoop (Kampen: Kok, 1947); and Triumph, 1954. Daane ("Man," 25) wonders if anyone has ever been as able as Berkouwer to confront Barth in a scholarly manner.

<sup>1</sup>General Revelation, 24-25, and Providence, 46. This seems to Berkouwer a philosophical definition of revelation that cannot be supported from the Scriptures (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, reviews of Faith and Justification, The Person of Christ, and Modern Uncertainty and Christian faith, by G. C. Berkouwer, in Evangelical Quarterly 19 (1956): 47.

<sup>2</sup>General Revelation, 210. See also Cornelius Van Til, Christianity and Barthianism (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), 153.

<sup>3</sup>"General and Special Divine Revelation," in Revelation and the Bible, ed. C. F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), 23-24, and General Revelation, 87-116.

<sup>4</sup>CD II.2, 124. See also Green, 182-186; Mueller, 96-110; and von Balthasar, 155-164.

opinion, this makes divine election coincide with Christ and brings Barth to the precipice of apokatastasis or universalism.<sup>1</sup> Barth's view of election makes the substitutionary atonement an empty matter because his view of atonement is that it merely realizes the fact of universal election. For Berkouwer, atonement cannot be truly understood unless it is in the context of penal satisfaction.<sup>2</sup> The problem here for Berkouwer is that the judgment and wrath of God are belittled.<sup>3</sup> Barth's view negates any reason for preaching, for in his scheme, the gospel has no crucial role to play in the working of grace since there is no room for the human response in regards to salvation. Election, for Berkouwer, is never portrayed in the Bible as a state of affairs involving all humans irrespective of their response to it." According to Berkouwer, Barth's position tended to neglect the need for an emphasis upon the mission of the church.

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<sup>1</sup>Justification, 164-165. For Berkouwer, grace is identical with election, and the grace of God in Christ brings Berkouwer into conflict with Barth's idea that Christ is the ontological foundation of election (Smedes, "Berkouwer," 77). "It was, therefore, inevitable," writes Rousas Rushdoony, "that Berkouwer's book on divine election rejects the traditional and Barthian view of election and reprobation" (review of Divine Election, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Torch and Trumpet 10 [October, 1960]: 22). Berkouwer, in his book on election, holds that Barth has misrepresented Calvin in relation to Christ as the Electing One (Osterhaven, "Divine Election," 51). Berkouwer sees here an unwarranted emphasis on the teaching that man cannot fall from grace because of the a priori electing love of Christ and faithfulness of God (Triumph of Grace, 228-233). Sin becomes ontologically impossible. Barth, in Berkouwer's view, excludes the ability to sin with which man was created, a tension one finds nowhere in the Bible.

<sup>2</sup>"Universalism," 5-6. See also John Kromminga, review of De Triomf der Genade in de Theologie van Karl Barth, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Calvin Forum 21 (August-September, 1955): 14; Van Til, Barthianism, 170; and Johnston, "Original Sin," 318.

<sup>3</sup>Berkouwer, "Universalism," Christianity Today, 13 May 1957, 5. Barth has placed himself clearly in favor of the universal love of God and its corollary, universal salvation in Christ (Van Til, Barthianism, 155).

<sup>4</sup>Triumph of Grace, 17. See also Smedes, "Berkouwer," 71, 78-79. Thus, the preaching of the gospel is robbed of any meaning if there is no response to it.

After years of dialoguing with him, Berkouwer came to a significantly different view of Barth's theology.<sup>1</sup> He reversed his opposition to Barth's idea of revelation and praised him for his criticism of general revelation as a striking reaction against the jeopardizing of special revelation in Jesus Christ by other sources of knowledge. Barth, for Berkouwer, has reemphasized "the gap between God and man, something that had been lost in the nineteenth century."<sup>2</sup> With enormous stress, Barth was progressively perceived as calling attention to the relation of faith and revelation. In Berkouwer's mind, the development of Barth's thought revealed with increasing clarity that the latter's theology was a theology of the triumph of grace, whereby forgiveness and justification are extended to the ungodly.<sup>3</sup> On the basis of this shift, Berkouwer was able to go so far as to defend Barth against the charge that his theology led to universalism. This he did by explaining that what he, Berkouwer, had previously termed as universalism was, in fact, an emphasis upon the universal preaching of

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<sup>1</sup>"Authority," 197. One can see this difference in two of the books Berkouwer published about Barth, Karl Barth (Kampen: Kok, 1936) and Triumph, 1954. Extended dialogue with Barth has changed the perspective of Berkouwer from a critical stance against Karl Barth to one of increasing congeniality, with implications for the issue of the mission of the church (Fred H. Klooster, "Predestination: A Calvinistic Note," in Perspectives on Evangelical Theology, ed. Kenneth Kantzer and Stanley Gundry [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979], 85). Mark Karlberg suggests that Berkouwer represents the Neo-Orthodox trend within Reformed theology in relation to the covenant ("The Original State of Adam: Tensions within Reformed Theology," Evangelical Quarterly 87 [1987]: 309), while Van Til holds that Berkouwer in recent publications has made use of the neo-orthodox pattern or framework of thought, particularly in regard to Scripture (Sovereignty, 50). On the other hand, Rogers ("Alternative," 78) perceives Berkouwer as being in line with the Reformation, particularly in regard to his view of Scripture, hermeneutics, and the emphasis on the saving message of the Bible.

<sup>2</sup>"Changing Climate," 4, and "Divine Revelation," 19.

<sup>3</sup>Conflict, 228, and Kromminga ("Triomf," 13).

the gospel of grace.<sup>1</sup> The destiny of the church for Barth, according to Berkouwer's new understanding, lies in her witness-being.

We must take note, in the first place, that Barth discusses the church in this connection in the chapter dealing with the 'destiny of the elect.' He speaks here of the elect being destined for salvation. This salvation is not an immanent but a transeunt [sic] salvation. It is therefore a salvation which leads to gratitude and in this gratitude to a 'representation and a portrayal of the glory of God and of his works.' In short: the destiny of the church lies in its witness-being. The line of the triumph of grace receives its extension here--from election to the witness concerning God's grace.<sup>2</sup>

Berkouwer was impressed with what he perceived as Barth's direction of thinking. In accepting Karl Barth's understanding of the church in terms of its witness-being, Berkouwer gained at least three insights which became important in his own understanding of the church. He acquired a new and deeper appreciation for the universal preaching of the gospel of grace. He saw an intimate relation between election and the mission of the church. And, finally, he established a strong connection between the essence of the church and her function.

#### *Neo-Protestantism and Scripture*

Early in his career, Berkouwer opposed the conclusions of historical criticism and its view of Scripture.<sup>3</sup> He saw Neo-

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<sup>1</sup>G. C. Berkouwer, The Return of Christ, trans. James van Oosterom and ed. Marlin Van Elderen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 399. See also Berkouwer, "Universalism," 6.

<sup>2</sup>Triumph of Grace, 108. (Allereest letten we er op, dat Barth over de kerk spreekt in het hoofdstuk over «die Bestimmung der Erwählten». Er is hier sprake van een bestemming tot zaligheid, maar daarin gaat het niet om immanente, maar om transeunte zaligheid, d.w.z. zij leidt tot danken en daarin tot «Repräsentierung und Abbildung der Herrlichkeit Gottes selbst und ihres Werkes». Kortom: de bestemming der gemeente ligt in haar *getuige-zijn*. Duidelijk zien we hier de lijn van de triomf der genade doorlopen: van de verkiezing naar het getuigenis van Gods genade [DE 101-102]). Berkouwer goes on to say it is not accidental from the perspective of these considerations that Barth views missions in the light of election (119, English ed.). Suffice it to say here that this view has exercised a major influence on Berkouwer's ecclesiology.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Modern Uncertainty and Christian Faith (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 12-24.

Protestantism,<sup>1</sup> with its claim for autonomy and its glorification of freedom, its criticism of Scripture and of miracles, as "profane and having robbed the Reformation of its subjection to Scripture."<sup>2</sup> This is especially true in reference to Bultmann's demythologization of the Scripture. Demythologizing the Bible affects the church in the "essentials of faith" because it destroys her confession regarding the primacy of Scripture as well as her testimony to the historical Christ and the salvation he brings.<sup>3</sup> Is the confession of Christ as God the product of a pious projection of the church as the critics hold or the fruit of revelation as Scriptures claim? At this early stage, Berkouwer opts for the latter answer.<sup>4</sup>

Through the dialogue that he carried on with Neo-Protestantism, however, Berkouwer came to hold that "historical research, with its disclosures of sources and official records, sometimes brings about major new understandings of ancient

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<sup>1</sup>By the questions it raised in the 18th and 19th centuries, historical criticism challenged some of the very foundations of Christianity. It denied the unity and coherence of the Scriptures, which increasingly lost their normativity. This movement was termed Neo-Protestantism by Berkouwer. See G. C. Berkouwer, The Person of Christ, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 135. See also Church, 230-234, and Conflict, 212.

<sup>2</sup>Modern Uncertainty, 34, and Recent Developments in Roman Catholic Thought (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 72-73. Berkouwer believes that while modern Protestantism spoke of a protest against Rome, it is really a protest against authority; the authority of the Holy Spirit and the authority of Scripture. Thus, according to Edward Tanis, Berkouwer exposes the weakness of modern Protestantism in its rejection of the authority of the infallible Scriptures (review of The Conflict with Rome, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Torch and Trumpet 3 [December, 1958]: 21). Klaas Runia states further that Berkouwer in Conflict holds that Neo-Protestantism is not an ally of those who wish to stand in the tradition of the Reformation (review of The Conflict with Rome, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Reformed Theological Review 18 [1959]: 55-56).

<sup>3</sup>"Climate," 16; "Revelation II," 22-23; and Holy Scripture, 255-256.

<sup>4</sup>Person of Christ, 32-33, 161, 178.



controversies."<sup>1</sup> The distinction between form and content most probably encouraged him in this direction, making it possible for him to reformulate dogma while strictly adhering to the underlying intention of the original definitions if not to its historical expression. In the same perspective, the theologian's task is to concentrate on the "divine content of Scripture rather than on its human form."<sup>2</sup> The form may be scientifically examined while the message does not change.<sup>3</sup>

On this basis, Berkouwer came to advocate the view that the content or message of Scripture is what is most important and not the

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<sup>1</sup>"Climate," 16; "Revelation II," 22-23; and Holy Scripture, 255-256. See also Rogers, "Alternative," 78.

<sup>2</sup>"Climate," 16 [1956]; "Revelation II," 22-23 [1958]; and Holy Scripture, 255-256 [1966-1967]. In the two former articles written in the late 1950s, it is impossible for the critics to know the historical Christ says Berkouwer. But apparently he had a change of heart on this issue by the middle 1960s when he wrote his volumes on Scripture. Now, Berkouwer (Holy Scripture, 255-256) interprets Bultmann's efforts to demythologize Scripture as an attempt to stress the content of the kerygma. In Berkouwer's opinion, Bultmann is attempting to understand the myth-clothed utterances of the NT and give them relevance for today's society (*ibid.*, 255-256). Thus, for our author, there is no exact historiography in the gospels, but rather a subjective interpretation of the evangelists. Our basic presuppositions about Scripture are to be taken in the light of form criticism and a recognition that the Bible is a product of its times (Kistemaker, 9).

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, F. E. Crowe, review of The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism, by G. C. Berkouwer, in Canadian Journal of Theology 12 (1966): 143. This acceptance of the form/content model of understanding dogma represents a significant change in Berkouwer's thinking. Thus, in 1938, in his Het Probleem der Schriftkritiek (Kampen: Kok, 1938), he totally discounted this distinction and relegated it to non-reformed theology inimical to the true Reformation stand. In 1966-1967, in his book Holy Scripture, he accepted certain historical critical premises, even calling into question the historicity of the Genesis 1-3 account (Bogue, "Evolution," 156-157). This led Berkouwer to define error in the Bible as stubborn resistance from the heart but not wrong understanding of the mind (Rogers, Confessions, 138). Thus, error in the Scripture is rejecting the content of the Bible, and not its human form. Biblical infallibility, for Berkouwer, according to Richard Gaffin, excludes error only in the sense of deception and intent to deceive. There is room, therefore, in this scheme for other types of errors, like those of mistakes of authors of the Bible or their incorrect reporting of historical events ("Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy, Part 2, Herman Bavinck," Westminster Theological Journal 45 [1983]: 273). Bogue criticizes Berkouwer on this point, when he states that Berkouwer's definition of error as intentional deception can make any book inerrant if its express purpose is not to deceive ("Evolution," 141 note 28).

fact that the Bible is an infallible book of timeless propositions.<sup>1</sup> The Bible was no longer to be preached as a compilation of sterile timeless truths but rather as a living message about Christ and the salvation he brings. This living message forms the content of Scripture as it provides the impetus and the content for the proclamation of the gospel demanded of the church in her mission.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Roman Catholicism and Ecclesiology*

For Berkouwer, most of the points of controversy between Rome and the Reformation converge at the doctrine of the church.<sup>3</sup> He disagreed with Rome in her understanding of the mass,<sup>4</sup> sacraments,<sup>5</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup>Holy Scripture, 225-239; Half-Century, 107-143; and Second Vatican Council, 89-111. See also Bogue, "Evolution," 139, 168; Baker, 91; Krabbendam, "Warfield," 442; Geoffrey Bromiley, review of Holy Scripture, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Christianity Today, 21 November 1975, 44; Bogue, "Battle," 389-391; Krabbendam, "Functional Theology," 303. This did not mean, for Berkouwer, that Protestants are forced to abandon their convictions on the necessity of the Reformation, but it does call them to honesty and genuineness (Second Vatican Council, 44-45). The church should be aware that research into the discrepancies and divergences found in the gospels is not a faithless and illegitimate undertaking (see Half-Century, 120; Scripture, 9; and, R. O. Zorn, review of Verontrusting en Verantwoordelijkheid, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Torch and Trumpet 19 (November, 1969): 7). See also Bradford, "Council," 90, who strongly criticizes Berkouwer for conceding too much to higher criticism.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Holy Scripture, 327-345, and Half-Century, 144-178, especially 177-178.

<sup>3</sup>Second Vatican Council, 146; Conflict, 3-13; Church, 17-19; Recent Developments, 7-8; Modern Uncertainty, 80-82; and "Reformed View," 7. Clearly the most important issue in Berkouwer's Second Vatican Council is the nature of the church (Laurence Porter, review of The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Evangelical Quarterly 39 [1967]: 239-240). See also Alexander De Jong, review of Conflict met Rome, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Wesminster Theological Journal 11 (1949): 221, and James C. Eelman, review of The Conflict with Rome, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Reformed Review 12 (December, 1958): 54.

<sup>4</sup>Berkouwer saw the mass as a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, a denial of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice (Perserverance, 135). This, in his opinion, is contrary to the Biblical "once" of Heb 9:26 ("Revelation II," 23).

<sup>5</sup>The purpose of the sacraments for Berkouwer is to make the believers rest in the fulfilled work of Christ in faith (Sacraments, 85-86). The Roman Catholic understanding, however, leads to the idea that the priests take the place of the Redeemer (ibid., 271). Grace in this

the identification of the church with Christ.<sup>1</sup> What is more significant for our study is Berkouwer's objection, in his early thinking, to the Roman Catholic understanding of the nature of the church.

Berkouwer's primary concern in this regard was the way that Roman Catholicism viewed the church's attributes of unity and catholicity.<sup>2</sup> Since she could point to her universal expansion throughout twenty centuries and in all nations, Rome appealed to her catholicity as proof that she was the true church. In Berkouwer's view, this caused a tendency to attempt to establish the guarantee of the church on a visible and objective level. Her guarantee was to be found in the offices of the church, illustrated by the simple rule "wherever the Pope is, there is the church."<sup>3</sup> The institutional dimensions of

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understanding is not the free favor of God in which he forgives sin, but a created, hyperphysical power which is infused into man through the mediation of the priest and the sacraments (Faith and Sanctification, trans. by John Vriend [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952], 83). Thus, partaking of the communion--in the Roman Catholic understanding--is a meritorious human work (Conflict, 187). This view of the sacraments went against the basic teaching of Scripture on the nature of grace (Sacraments, 36) and was anchored in the Roman Catholic understanding of the church and the priesthood rather than in the Scriptural doctrine of God's grace in Christ (ibid., 69).

<sup>1</sup>Conflict, 12. Berkouwer holds that there is every reason to believe that the conflict between Rome and the Reformation will assume sharp lines at this juncture (Conflict, 179). See also Runia, "Conflict," 56. For Berkouwer, this caused two problems. It ignores the correlation between faith and revelation and moved the description of the church into the realm of metaphysics, out of the realm of the empirical (Church, 170). In this sense, the church is viewed outside of the actual situation of the scattered sheep. Besides, it detaches the incarnation from its purpose within redemption, i.e., that of restoring humans to relationship with God for service to their neighbor (Conflict, 206).

<sup>2</sup>The close ties existing between these two attributes of the church had a definite effect on the ordering of the church's attributes and their discussion in Berkouwer's volume on the church as we note in the next chapter.

<sup>3</sup>Church, 176. Their tendency then was to resort to a blind obedience to the structure of the church (ibid., 251). It also puts the church in the position of hardly being able to change (Half-Century, 225). This kind of status, maintains Berkouwer, had always held a great fascination for Roman Catholicism because one could clearly and unambiguously speak about the grand fact of the church.

the church became the most important aspect of the true church, ascertainable and verifiable for all.<sup>1</sup> While Berkouwer recognized that Rome had rightly rejected any idea of a "pluriform" church because of her realization that the church was one, he held that this led Rome to overemphasize the visible unity of the church. Stressing the universality of the church as a sign of her unity, Rome strove prematurely for the unity of the kingdom of God. This was unacceptable to Berkouwer who felt that Rome had not only emphasized quantitative catholicity at the expense of its qualitative nature, but had done this solely in order to prove that she was the true church. This, in Berkouwer's opinion, produced a unity that was more apparent than real.<sup>2</sup>

In the dialogical process, Berkouwer began to reconsider some of his positions.<sup>3</sup> The Roman Catholic Church, in his opinion, had begun to claim less exclusively the church's attributes of catholicity and unity as proof that she and she alone was the only true church.<sup>4</sup> Thus, for him, "the vestigia today are being recognized by Roman Catholics as the footprints of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the other

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<sup>1</sup>Church, 108, 35, and Eelman, 53-54. The church, then, no longer stood under the testing of Scripture (Second Vatican Council, 162-163). Rome understandably accused the Reformation of bringing about a total dislocation of authority when it split with the Roman Catholic.

<sup>2</sup>Conflict, 4. For Berkouwer there are two types of catholicity: quantitative or geographical and qualitative or doctrinal (Church, 107-111, and Zachariah, 188). Vunderink (review of De Kerk. I. Eenheid en Katholiceit, by G. C. Berkouwer, In The Banner, 7 May 1971, 25) describes quantitative catholicity for Berkouwer as being spread throughout the world and qualitative catholicity as a deep unity among the churches on the basis of a true confession.

<sup>3</sup>Hesselink ("Recent Developments," 44) points out that Berkouwer no longer emphasizes the conflict with Rome (as in his book Conflict with Rome) but what Rome and evangelical theology now have in common (Second Vatican Council). See also Hughes, "Council," 63; Rogers, Confessions, 142; and Porter, "Council," 239.

<sup>4</sup>Church 115.

churches."<sup>1</sup> This, as Berkouwer saw it, gave Rome an opportunity to critically reflect on the concrete church in the light of the gospel and its demand for proclamation rather than requiring her to deal with the church from a metaphysical perspective. The essence of the church in both Reformed and Roman Catholic traditions, holds Berkouwer, is "the relationship with Christ in faith and its resulting call to service."<sup>2</sup> What had become increasingly clear, he held, is that a common understanding was developing between Rome and the Reformation and the conviction that the important issue for the church is the connection of the gift of Christ and the corresponding task of mission assigned in the light of the gift.<sup>3</sup> All churches have a common task, i.e., to become missionaries of the gospel. This is not accomplished from a "self-assured apologetic but in humility and under the subjection to the cross."<sup>4</sup> Thus, the true intent of the description of the nature of the church in her attributes of catholicity and unity is to remind her of her mission of spreading the gospel. What Berkouwer gained from his dialogue with Roman Catholicism, therefore, was a greater appreciation for the universal geographical expansion of the church through its proclamation and the deep unity implicit in the nature of the church that proceeds from that proclamation. Thus, he began to focus on the

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<sup>1</sup>Church, 71. This change is attributed to the current interest within Roman Catholicism in the study of Scripture (Recent Developments, 42). It has led to a mitigation in the triumphalism of Rome and is not merely a change in theological position, but a new attitude in Rome's posture toward the non-Roman Catholic churches ("Reformed Review," 7).

<sup>2</sup>Church, 18-19, 69, 189.

<sup>3</sup>In this regard, Berkouwer holds that John XXIII marks the end of the frequently negative and antithetical posture of Rome. The pope's accent was a positive emphasis laid on the witness about Christ, who was sent into the world, and on the witness of the church (Second Vatican Council, 17).

<sup>4</sup>Church, 121-122. See also Second Vatican Council, 35. Thus, writes Berkouwer, "in the new Roman Catholic ecclesiological literature, much is said about the church as sacramentum mundi, the sacrament of the world" (Church, 395 n. 13).

nature of the church as expressed from the perspective of the interrelated attributes of unity and catholicity.

#### Summary

Berkouwer is certainly perceived as a Biblical and Confessional theologian. His attempt to retain this posture has had no small effect on his methodology. I have noted that one of its major principles is correlation, the primary correlation for Berkouwer's theology being that of faith and revelation. This influenced Berkouwer to focus on the proclamation of the gospel as the task of theology and of the church rather than to think in ontological categories when considering the nature and role of the church. From this concern about the mission of the church arises a second important principle in Berkouwer's methodology, that of dialogue. Dialogue is an active listening which takes into consideration the viewpoint of the other side in a responsible manner. The process of dialogue has caused shifts in Berkouwer's theological understanding on at least three points. From Barth, Berkouwer has gained an increased appreciation for the relationship between the essence of the church and its function, the connection between the election and the mission of the church, and the universal preaching of the gospel. Neo-Protestantism inclined Berkouwer to focus on the message of Scripture rather than its form, a message that describes the content of the church's proclamation in her mission. From Roman Catholicism, Berkouwer acquired a stronger emphasis on the nature of the church from the perspective of the interrelated attributes of unity and catholicity.

In all of these considerations, Berkouwer has been led time and again to an emphasis on the universal preaching of the gospel, which is the mission of the church. I now turn to some foundational theological themes of Berkouwer to see how these emphases affect his understanding of doctrine and how they provide the foundation for his view of the nature of the church.

Foundational Themes in  
Berkouwer's Theology

My purpose here is not to address every aspect of Berkouwer's theology. That would lie beyond the intention of this study. We examine now three foundational themes which are crucial to Berkouwer's understanding of the nature of the church, i.e., his view of Scripture, God, and anthropology.

Holy Scripture

There is, for Berkouwer, a special calling implicit in today's theology, a calling for willingness to give one's self wholly to the understanding and obedience of the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> "Theology's clarity and relevance is based on its attentiveness to the Word. Speculation and imagination emasculate a theologian and cause him to forget the incomprehensibility of God."<sup>2</sup> The Bible, in his view, is a functional rather than a philosophical book.<sup>3</sup> Scripture is the sole instrument whereby the revelation of God in Christ can be known. It is only here that we hear the message of salvation. This is why understanding Scripture is so important. The central focus of its message is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. "If one thing is

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<sup>1</sup>"Climate," 16.

<sup>2</sup>Justification, 21, and Daane, "Man," 46. Theology is relevant only when it is relative to the Word of God. The central concern, however, must be in hearing and obeying the divine message of salvation, rather than deifying or demythologizing the human milieu in which the message came ("Hearing," 64. See also Bogue, A Hole, 6, and Rogers, "Alternative," 77). This would help the modern Protestant church to follow in the footsteps of the Reformers and to know the power of the Reformation in its present life. The power of the Reformation was not in the nobility of its champions nor in their great number, but in the power of the gospel in the church as the church read Scriptures (Modern Uncertainty, 45).

<sup>3</sup>R. Barnes (3) writes, "Berkouwer has removed the Bible from the philosophical, scientific arena and placed it in a functional-oriented position with faith as an a priori condition for accepting the authority of Scripture." See also Louis Berkhof, review of Faith and Sanctification, by G. C. Berkouwer, in Banner, 89 (1954), 598 and, Elton Eenigenburg, review of Recent Developments in Roman Catholic Thought, by G. C. Berkouwer, in Reformed Review 12 (1958): 60.

certain, revelation is not an intellectual game but is a matter of the heart because it concerns the revelation of the living God who calls us and promises us eternal life, who is just and merciful, and who has revealed himself through Jesus Christ. . . . The entire Word of God is made manifest in Christ."<sup>1</sup> The emphasis is placed on the saving content of the biblical message.

This stress on the message of Scripture is in line with the obvious intent of the Reformation because the sola scriptura principle called upon by the Reformation was not confronted with a dualism between the authoritative Scripture and the message it brings. Reformed theology hears the message of salvation precisely in the witness of Scripture.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, the saving message of Scripture can only be understood from the perspective and in the context of a living faith in Christ.<sup>3</sup> It is only through faith that we are able to grasp the meaning of the gospel for our lives.<sup>4</sup> Still, faith alone cannot establish the authoritative content of Scripture. This, for Berkouwer, occurs solely through the power of the Holy Spirit. Belief in Scripture in Berkouwer's thinking is not to be considered an irrational, isolated, personal response to the message of Scripture nor an intellectualization of it, but rather a commitment accompanied by trust in the personal God

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<sup>1</sup>"Revelation, III," 18. See also Holy Scripture, 109; and, "Reformed Faith and the Modern Concept of Man," International Reformed Bulletin 1 (1958): 8-9.

<sup>2</sup>Holy Scripture, 53. By implication, tradition can only mean a commitment to the salvation which appeared in the past. The question that matters, for Berkouwer, is how the Lord of the church, who is also Lord of the tradition leads his people from the past into the present. "When the Reformation declared sola scriptura, it wanted to keep alive the question of one's commitment to the Lord and the Gospel" (Second Vatican Council, 100).

<sup>3</sup>Holy Scripture, 55. For Berkouwer, sola fide was not presented as a discreet aspect or section of the Reformed tradition, but it embraces the whole gospel. It is only through the confession of sola fide that the revival of the gospel in one's life occurs (Justification, 40-41). Faith is not a constituent element of salvation. If this were so, faith could be considered as a meritorious work. Hence, for Berkouwer, it is of great importance that the Reformed Confessions do not view faith in Scripture as a preparation for true faith (Holy Scripture, 65).

<sup>4</sup>Justification, 40-41.



who stands behind the Bible, i.e., a commitment which is connected with the divine witness of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the Spirit, in this regard, is "not to give us new and hitherto unheard of revelations but to confirm the teaching of the gospel in our hearts."<sup>2</sup>

In light of this confirming function of the Holy Spirit, Berkouwer is led to hold that for the church and Scripture there is one terminal point, that all might know Christ.<sup>3</sup> Scripture's most important function is in its proclamation of salvation to all.<sup>4</sup> The message is "go and proclaim the risen Christ to the world." This appeal is not powered by human intellect but by the Word of God through the power of the Holy Spirit who brings faith's response forth from men.<sup>5</sup> The Church must witness in the world and the Word provides the message and vehicle for that witness.<sup>6</sup> This perspective of the sufficiency of Scripture through the Holy Spirit brings men to a knowledge of salvation

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<sup>1</sup>Holy Scripture, 39. For Berkouwer, the testimony of the Spirit is the a priori concept that undergirds the written word with authority. This testimony had several functions. First, it initiates and gives certainty for both the faith of the believer and the written testimony. One's concept of salvation is tied to the Spirit's testimony. Finally, the certainty of faith and faith in the Scripture are synthesized through the Spirit's testimony (Barnes, 139-140). The certainty of one's faith for Berkouwer, explains Bogue, is not grounded in an infallible Scripture but in the recognition that Scripture is the Word of God, a recognition that grows out of one's faith. This allows Berkouwer to refuse a discussion of the Scripture apart from a personal relationship with God, providing a correlation between faith and an object of faith, namely God and his Word ("Battle," 391-392). As Louis Praamsma ("Schrift," 15) has noted, Berkouwer's position that Holy Scripture is the Word of God applies his method of correlation in such a manner as to hold that one must first be bound to the gospel, to the Christ of Scripture, from which alone a reflection on Scripture can result.

<sup>2</sup>Holy Scripture, 57.

<sup>3</sup>Person, 96-97.

<sup>4</sup>Holy Scripture, 234-235.

<sup>5</sup>Berkouwer, "The Silent God?" Christianity Today, 8 November 1963, 8.

<sup>6</sup>"Thought," 4 July 1960, 40. The aim of Scripture concerns a situation that is in complete opposition to all passivity, since it is filled with concrete activity" (Holy Scripture, 314).

that enables them for service to God in proclaiming the Christian message.

#### God

The vital and decisive question for our day is whether or not God has let himself be known. For Berkouwer, God does reveal himself in the history of the world, for even in its darkest aspects, the world is defined by the revelation and salvation of God.<sup>1</sup> The two most conspicuous ways this happens is through God's providence and election.

#### *Providence*

According to Berkouwer, everything that God has revealed concerning his sustenance (the continuation or prolongation) of the world is organically connected with the salvation that God has wrought in Christ.<sup>2</sup> Even though God has given evidences of his activity and presence in the world, these cannot obscure the fact that Jesus is the

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<sup>1</sup>"The Church in the Last Days," Christianity Today, 14 April 1958, 4. The fact that Berkouwer has never devoted a book on the doctrine of God should not be understood to mean that he showed little interest in the subject (Karlberg, 80, n. 15). In 1974, he wrote an article entitled "Doctrina de Deo" in which he reacted to H. Berkhof's "Christelijk Geloof" (in Weerwoord [Nijkerk: G. F. Callenbach, 1974], 102-110). His books Providence of God [Dutch ed., 1950] and Divine Election (trans. by Hugo Bekker [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960]--Dutch ed., 1955) represent his extended attempts to wrestle with certain aspects of the doctrine of God. He has also written about God in a certain number of his articles which appeared in other publications ("Revelation, I, II, III" [1958]"; "Thought, 4 July 1960"; "Election and Doctrinal Reaction," Christianity Today, 10 April 1961; "Satan and the Demons" [1961]; "Silent God" [1963]; and, "Vragen rondom de belijdenis," Gereformeerde Theologisch Tijdschrift (1963): 1-40.

<sup>2</sup>For Berkouwer, it is the doctrine of providence that assures us that God through Christ rules over the works of his hands (Return, 128-129, and Van Til, Barthianism, 153). His doctrine of providence centers on and finds its exclusive key in this salvation that Christ brings to man. It can only be known within the revelation of Christ (Providence, 59). See also Smedes, "Berkouwer," 71, and Lloyd-Jones, "Faith," 109). Even miracles, in Berkouwer's thinking, are not a problem of contra naturam but God's work in his people for the salvation of the world.

revelation of God.<sup>1</sup> Thus, it is only through God's special revelation in Christ that we can understand the purpose of creation and sustenance of the world.<sup>2</sup> The message of this special revelation and the providence of God is God's love demonstrated in Christ. This love is shown in the forgiveness of Christ, which fully manifests the love, character, and grace of God.<sup>3</sup> This means that the Father remains near to us in Christ and is involved in the affairs of this world through him. "From the entire gospel," holds Berkouwer, "it is apparent that ultimately Christ in his suffering was not a victim of human arbitrariness and fathomless enmity, which do play a part in his crucifixion, but of God's hand that holds the reins throughout the plan of salvation."<sup>4</sup> Thus, God has purposeful dealings with the world.

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<sup>1</sup>Berkouwer, "Reviewing Revelation," Christianity Today, 6 January 1967, 46. For Berkouwer, this understanding, incidentally, solves the difficulties involved in speaking about the relationship of Christ and the Father. It is Christ who reveals the Father ("Revelation, III," 17). It is in the particular revelation in Jesus Christ that the way is opened up again to us whereby we know God in his universal doings (General Revelation, 306). Even election, as we see below, must begin from the vantage point of God's revelation in Christ, not in the hidden counsels of God. See also William Childs Robinson, review of Divine Election, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Christianity Today, 23 May 1960, 33.

<sup>2</sup>"Divine Revelation," 18. In this context, general revelation emphasizes the guilt and lost condition of fallen man, who can see the works of God but cannot understand them outside the special revelation given by God in Christ (*ibid.*, 16). Thus, special and general revelation do not stand in antithesis to each other nor in a relationship of rivalry, but both find their unity in the sovereign activity of God in sustaining the world (General Revelation, 292).

<sup>3</sup>Berkouwer, Sin, trans. by Philip Holtrop (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 393. The Christian Church sees in this sense, a direct line of connection between the forgiveness of sins, Christ, and God.

<sup>4</sup>Berkouwer, The Work of Christ, trans. by Cornelius Lambregtse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 141. Thus, the grace of God in Christ is never lost sight of, nor does Berkouwer separate faith from that grace (De Waard, 57). The Scriptures present the message of Christ's resurrection as being of essential and decisive significance. Again and again the message calls one's attention to both the crucifixion and the resurrection, which forms the content of the gospel (Work, 181). And, the church, in her proclamation, preached the death and burial of Christ as well as his resurrection (*ibid.*, 171). See also William H. Rutgers, review of The Work of Christ, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Torch and Trumpet 17 (January, 1967): 22.

This, holds Berkouwer, is "in opposition to the universal application of the scientific method in which the world is seen as sealed by a mechanistic, natural causality which claims that divine intervention is not only unnecessary but impossible."<sup>1</sup>

Hence, providence entails three features. First, there is sustenance, or the preservation of the world for the purpose of grace. Second, there is government. God governs the world in such a manner as to accomplish his redemptive purpose for the world. Finally, there is concurrence, the fact that humans have a part to play in the decision to accept or reject God and his providence.<sup>2</sup>

These three features of providence, especially the idea of concurrence, led Berkouwer to view the doctrine of providence from the perspective of the proclamation of the gospel.<sup>3</sup> This proclamation is vital for Berkouwer because humankind cannot even recognize the message of providence, much less answer it unless the good news of God in Christ has been heard through the apostolic preaching. People can only accept or reject God in the light of the true knowledge of him and his love, and they can only know God in the truest sense as he has been revealed in Christ, who can be known in the world only as the church faithfully proclaims the gospel.<sup>4</sup> This places an enormous responsibility on the church. She must live and proclaim the gospel in such a way that it is not obscured but made so clear that all can understand it.<sup>5</sup> Salvation in Jesus Christ, which providence announces, is intimately connected with election, whose theology deserves close attention.

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<sup>1</sup>Providence, 188.

<sup>2</sup>"Divine Revelation," 17-18, and Smedes, "Berkouwer," 71-74.

<sup>3</sup>Return, 128-129.

<sup>4</sup>Sin, 292. See also Johnston, "Original Sin," 318.

<sup>5</sup>"Election," 13.

### Election

Election, explains Berkouwer, is unmistakably God's gracious act of salvation in Jesus Christ, an act in which he leads his people out of sin and into a personal relationship with him.<sup>1</sup> It can never be viewed as separate from or prior to grace, but must be identified in its relationship with the unmerited love of God.<sup>2</sup> Thus, election does not rest in human effort or merit.<sup>3</sup> Whoever expects salvation to come from grace rather than from works is immediately placed within the sphere of election.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Divine Election, 13, and Conflict, 78-79. See also Fred Klooster, review of Faith and Perseverance, by G. C. Berkouwer, in Westminster Theological Journal 21 (1960): 13. Two doctrines, in Berkouwer's opinion, have borne the brunt of the attack from outside, divine election and original sin. In the case of election, an ironclad determinism prompted these attacks (Sin, 424; "Doctrinal Reaction," 12-13, and Half-Century, 79). At the outset of the Reformation, there was little difference of opinion on the subject of election. It soon became clear, however, that the final word had not been spoken. When questions arose about the inalienability of grace, it was natural that the issue of an eternal decree would arise (Perseverance, 56-57, and Divine Election, 102). Thus election, explains Berkouwer as he addresses Karl Barth, touches immediately on the problems of preaching and the certainty of salvation (Triumph, 281).

<sup>2</sup>Perseverance, 230, and Divine Election, 76.

<sup>3</sup>Rather, election in Christ rules out all merit precisely because it is election in Christ (Divine Election, 143).

<sup>4</sup>Half-Century, 102. ". . . tegen een «potentia absoluta», maar vanuit de wegen der verkiezing zelf, vanuit deze doorzichtige tegenstelling van Rom. 9:11, waardoor duidelijk wordt, dat wie het niet van der werken verwacht, maar vande genade . . . (DE 142-143)." See also Baker, 100. Here, Berkouwer interprets Rom 9-11 as emphasizing the fact that Paul is not speaking from the perspective of a divine, eternal decree, but is highlighting the nature of election: It is out of grace and not works (Divine Election, 71. See also Baker, 153; Van Til, Studies, 38; and Eugene Borowitz, "Anti-Semitism and the Christologies of Barth, Berkouwer, and Pannenberg," Dialog 16 [1977]: 40. Borowitz criticizes Berkouwer's understanding of election as being "unfair, prejudiced, tendentious, and eisegetic.") Berkouwer's understanding of election can be more clearly understood from his view of common grace. Common grace is sufficient to hold man in readiness as it were for the achievement of God's purpose. It is common grace that keeps the bonds between society, family, and friendships in tact. It provides a base in man for the performance of acts conformable to God's will but not in themselves meriting salvation. This appears close to Karl Barth's idea of the analogia relationis. See Riches, "Common Grace," 306-307.

The fact that salvation proceeds from grace does not ignore or destroy the role of the human being. The latter must accept salvation through faith.<sup>1</sup> But though faith also comes by grace, it is not intended to be considered self-existing apart from grace.<sup>2</sup> Although one's faith is of decisive significance, since without it there can be no salvation, it is not constitutive of salvation. Faith is neither the ground of salvation nor its cause but the means by which it comes to us.<sup>3</sup> Faith is merely the instrument through which we embrace Christ. It is wholly of grace and it holds us in fellowship with him who is our justification.<sup>4</sup> Faith is something that lives and is lived.<sup>5</sup> The believer's faith actually witnesses to and honors the free grace in the

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<sup>1</sup>Divine Election, 241. Thus, the gospel of redemption is proclaimed to the world as an appeal to faith which is not a condition for election but a response to it (Justification, 191). It is not an infused grace and has no functional value by itself (*ibid.*, 32). Election is sovereign and grace is an element of that election. Faith receives and actively participates in the reality of the Word and God. This understanding runs throughout Berkouwer's whole approach to doctrine (Cameron, "Reformation," 74-75). Thus, in Berkouwer's opinion, the mistake of subjectivism was that it gave the human subject a determinative and creative function making revelation dependent on subjective reaction and obscuring the unique relation between faith and revelation (*ibid.*, 17-18).

<sup>2</sup>Perseverance, 31, 199. See also Daane, "Man," 46. Salvation is based on election. There is no room here for the view that election occurs on the basis of foreseen faith. Believers are given over to Christ and gifted with true faith (Justification, 46). In this way, faith cannot be a meritorious work (Church, 251). Realizing faith as a work of grace puts faith in its proper perspective.

<sup>3</sup>Half-Century, 51. See also Timmer, "Theologian," 19. We are not justified through human achievement but through faith (Justification, 87, 200). Apart from faith, according to Berkouwer, we only construct logical systems in which unbelief is not taken seriously (Perseverance, 30). The way of salvation is a call to faith. Faith is a decision to accept and follow the way of salvation.

<sup>4</sup>Justification, 45. Faith is never a work of creativity, of mediacy, or of merit. It is never given as a ground for our justification; justification proceeds from divine grace alone (*ibid.*, 80).

<sup>5</sup>Berkouwer, "Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis," in God and the Good, ed. by Clifton Orelebeck and Lewis Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 17-18. This should cause Christians to have compassion for their neighbors. Berkouwer is certainly consistent here with his view of the image of God as that of being in relation with God and our fellow men. Note that even faith has to do with the mission of the church.

divine act of election.<sup>1</sup> Faith also places before all a decision concerning the redemptive acts of God.<sup>2</sup> The responsibility of the hearer of the gospel is to respond to Christ in faith.<sup>3</sup> This decision that the believer makes is a decision for or against Christ and for the purpose of accepting the salvation-election of God in Christ. The human reaction to the proclamation of salvation is of major significance for Berkouwer.<sup>4</sup>

But, in order for a person to be able to make the decision of faith to accept God's salvation in Christ, i.e., election, one must hear God's message. Election, then, must be proclaimed.<sup>5</sup> It summons the one flock to one discipleship in fellowship and relatedness. In respect to this call of election, the proclamation of grace automatically takes the form of an invitation to participate in the life and the fellowship of the church.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Justification, 145.

<sup>2</sup>Person, 40. Rather than switching off human reactions, the Word of God confronts its hearers with a choice and the necessity of a decision. Scripture does not blind humanity but calls them to discipleship. People in turn become witnesses of what they have heard and seen (Holy Scripture, 350-351, and General Revelation, 226-226).

<sup>3</sup>Cameron, "Reformation," 78. Berkouwer is deeply concerned about the human response of faith. If election is presented in such a way that God is construed to be a potentia absoluta, then humans will not be encouraged to believe in God (Baker, 69).

<sup>4</sup>Church, 153, and Smedes, "Berkouwer," 78. The Bible continually calls for faith and warns against unbelief (Triumph, 268). Hardening of the heart in Scripture is related to this. Hardening is never an arbitrary, causal matter. The divine hardening is closely related to the message of salvation, to the preaching of the gospel which evokes a decision. The gospel never leaves a person unchanged who listens and disobeys it. It compels that person to go the way of estrangement and judgment (Divine Election, 249).

<sup>5</sup>It never informs a person of a new state of affairs. Christ reminds those who remain in their sins that God's wrath abides on them. The gospel, then, must go to a world that lies under the bondage of corruption (Providence, 265). The message that sinners need to hear is the one call to reconciliation (Work, 294).

<sup>6</sup>Church, 141.

For Berkouwer, this militates against viewing election as a preordained divine decree. When election is spoken about as something that takes place behind-the-scenes, i.e., an eternal decree, it is perceived as something hidden and mysterious.<sup>1</sup> On this point, Scripture has demonstrated that election is neither a decretum absolutum that can be abstracted from Christ, nor a necessitas rerum which cannot be changed under any circumstances, nor a dark and irrational power of the potentia absoluta.

If election were an eternal decree, explains Berkouwer, the human decision in the process of salvation loses all meaning.<sup>2</sup> This would lead to determinism, which for Berkouwer, is antithetical to his emphasis upon the importance of faith in the believer. It turns God into an arbitrary Person and the author of sin since one has no choice and bears no responsibility for one's guilt as that guilt has been arbitrarily imposed upon him.<sup>3</sup>

More importantly for Berkouwer, if election is an eternal decree, there is no need to proclaim the gospel since human beings are unable to make a decision concerning it. Election, for Berkouwer, requires action from the believer, action which is based on the believer's response to the grace and mercy of God.<sup>4</sup> The fatalism of election as an eternal decree leaves no room for a real offer of grace, nor for a decision of the individual in regards to their election.

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<sup>1</sup>Half-Century, 80.

<sup>2</sup>Divine Election, 67-68, 172. God's election has nothing to do with sinister arbitrariness but prepares the way of salvation in which a person learns that salvation is only granted as a divine gift.

<sup>3</sup>Half-Century, 82-83.

<sup>4</sup>Sanctification, 26-27 and Man: The Image of God, trans. by D. W. Jellema (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 350.



There is, therefore, no need for an earnest preaching of the gospel and election.<sup>1</sup>

Berkouwer is deeply concerned about the biblical doctrine of election and the need to purge it from all deterministic connotations. He insists on underlining the importance of the decision of faith, and therefore the significance of the mission of the church in regards to election. It is through the mission of the church in her proclamation that humanity is confronted with salvation, grace, and election and brought to the place where humans can make a decision by faith for their salvation and enter into the election of God. The whole doctrine of election, as well as that of the providence of God, leads Berkouwer to stress the mission of the church.

#### Anthropology

For Berkouwer, humanity is presented in various ways in Scripture but never outside of a relationship to God. This relationship can be best expressed by the Biblical terminology of "the image of God."<sup>2</sup> When discussing the image, Berkouwer refers to an analogia

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<sup>1</sup>"Doctrinal Reaction," 12-13. See also Bogue, "Evolution," 154-155. Some have charged Berkouwer with Arminianism. See, for instance, Hoeksema, "Critique," 43; Bogue, Hole, 19; and, Bogue, "Evolution," 151-152. Berkouwer was strongly criticized by some of his more conservative Dutch Reformed colleagues for not accepting the traditional Reformed view of election as an eternal decree of double predestination (Osterhaven, "Election," 51). H. C. Hoeksema ("Critique," 41-43) went so far as to state that Berkouwer "has denied double predestination . . . and therefore has broken from the Reformed tradition."

<sup>2</sup>As Berkouwer sees it, anthropology has been pushed to the foreground in modern times because of the latter's tendency to emphasize the value and capabilities of man. What is stressed is a secular independent analysis apart from man's relationship to God ("Modern Concept," 6-7; Man, 12-13; and General Revelation, 223). This goes against the Scriptural teaching regarding the importance of man's unique relationship to God (Man, 33, 349). Berkouwer holds that the essence of anthropology is to be determined by the significance of the gospel for humanity ("Modern Concept," 5). The uniqueness of the human person lies in the fact that man is the crown of creation and that he alone is made in the image of God (Man, 67, 194). In this study, "man" does not signify the masculine gender of humanity but refers generically to all persons, both male and female.

relationis rather than an analogia entis. The image of God is first and foremost being-in-fellowship, which removes it from the realm of metaphysics and locates it in the context of salvation and God's love.<sup>1</sup> This is important since it is only God's love experienced in Christ that can restore human beings to a proper relationship with God.<sup>2</sup>

Being restored to fellowship with God, however, only partially renews God's image in humanity. Its fullness is completely restored when one's alienation from his neighbors is replaced by a sense of concern and love for them. The vanishing of alienation between persons occurs as the grace of God is shared and humans accept the message which brings reconciliation into fruition. The acceptance of God's grace makes it impossible if "their hearts are open to God's love to have them closed to their brother's need."<sup>3</sup> Hence, persons, once converted, are

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<sup>1</sup>Hoekema sees this as pitting Berkouwer against the traditional Reformed view of man ("Berkouwer on the Image of God, Part I," Reformed Journal 8 [May 1958]: 20). This traditional view held that there were two dimensions to be found in the imago dei, i.e., the wider sense (which included man's rationality, morality, and so-called immortality which distinguishes man from the animals) and its narrow sense (to which belonged man's true knowledge of God, righteousness, and man's holiness, i.e., man's original state of righteousness). The former was retained by man after the fall while the latter was lost by the first sin (see Herman Hoeksema, Reformed Dogmatics [Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966], 204-213, esp. 206-207). Berkouwer attributes to the usual approach to the image a tendency to think of man in terms of his ontological structure rather than in terms of his relatedness to God. The discussion of the broader aspect of the image for Berkouwer is an attempt to find something in man which has not been touched by sin (see, for example, Man, 67-119, 349-366, and Sin, 485-545). If correct, Berkouwer might have a legitimate complaint for the latter understanding would deny the Reformed understanding of the total depravity of man.

<sup>2</sup>Man, 105, 56, and Smedes, "Berkouwer," 82.

<sup>3</sup>Church, 96, and "Modern Concept," 12. In this understanding, sin becomes a forsaking of the relationship of God and in consequence, the forsaking of the service to one's fellowmen (Berkouwer, Sin, 39; and, John Murray, review of Sin, by G. C. Berkouwer, in Westminster Theological Journal 35 [1973]: 229). As John Riches has aptly pointed out, Berkouwer sees the corruption of sin affecting all social bonds of man's common humanity ("Common Grace," 307). There is need here to underscore the fact that for Berkouwer the confession of the total depravity of man is not a pessimistic confession but a confession of guilt in the light of the forgiveness of sins ("Modern Concept," 9). Because of his sin, man remains in rebellion to God and hates his fellowmen. Total depravity emphasizes the fact of a broken relationship

no longer primarily an individualistic human being, but one oriented towards others because of his/her restored relationship with God.<sup>1</sup> Grace, for Berkouwer, in view of this restored relationship with God and others, is "God moving into human life to create a fellowship of love and service between himself and man with faith being man's response to grace."<sup>2</sup> Redeemed humanity, in every aspect of its existence, is summoned to the service of the Lord. The signs of the believers' future transformation and glorification are already evident here on earth as evidenced by the call to service that occurs when one is restored to communion with the Lord.<sup>3</sup> Thus, for Berkouwer, a correct understanding of anthropology leads people back to the mission of the church. The believer has the responsibility to serve his/her neighbor by bringing to him/her the good news of God's love which reconciles humanity to him and humans to each other. Hence, Berkouwer's anthropology has had a significant effect on his understanding of ecclesiology.

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with God and man, a break which carries over in everything that one does as humans (Man, 161). The remnant of the image of God in humanity for Berkouwer then, does not imply a quantitative limitation of one's depravity, but refers to the essence of a person expressed through the grace of God restoring one's relationship with God and men ("Modern Concept," 10). Hence, the need for conversion, which enables humans to become truly human (Sin, 240-241).

<sup>1</sup>In Berkouwer's view, both justification and sanctification occur through the electing mercy of God (Divine Election, 295). Sola fide stands as the only true foundation for sanctification as well as for justification (Sanctification, 77, 129-130, 42-43). Separating both from grace would end in a doctrine of salvation glorifying human effort. Fearing the emphasis upon merit as found in Roman Catholic theology, some Christians devalue the necessity of good works in any form ("Doctrinal Reaction," 10). It is Berkouwer's perception that in spite of the clarity with which the Bible unites faith and works, the importance and depth of their unity is frequently underestimated and minimized ("Orthodoxy," 15).

<sup>2</sup>Sanctification, 151, 135, 12. See also, "Critique of Christ," Christianity Today, 25 May 1962, 7; and Smedes, "Berkouwer," 83. The church becomes necessary, for it is in the church that this fellowship occurs (Church, 153 n. 76).

<sup>3</sup>Return, 386, 197-198. It is striking, holds Berkouwer, that the two Scriptural references referring to "the man of God" (1 Tim 6:11 and 2 Tim 3:16-17) speak about flight from sin and of preparation for a task (Man, 349).

Conclusion

Reactions to Berkouwer's theology have been mixed. Some praise him for the breath of fresh air he has brought into the conservative-liberal debate as well as into Protestant theology.<sup>1</sup> Others have challenged the claim that he is a genuine representative of that tradition.<sup>2</sup> One thing remains certain, his influence has been considerable.

Two major emphases have surfaced in Berkouwer's methodology and his theology which are of considerable significance for his ecclesiology. The first is that of a reluctance to think in ontological or metaphysical categories. The second is a stress on the mission of the church. His view of Scripture, God, and anthropology reflect Berkouwer's concerns in these areas. In both emphases, the proclamation of the gospel is in the forefront of his thinking. With this in mind, we now turn to Berkouwer's understanding of the nature of the church.

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<sup>1</sup>See, for instance, Rogers, Confessions, 134; Berkhof, "Justification," 598; Rule, 42; and, Cameron, "Reformation," 73.

<sup>2</sup>Bogue, A Hole, 4. See also Bromiley, "Holy Scripture," 43; Bradford, "Council," 89-90; Bolt, "Principle," 31, n. 52 especially; Riches, "Common Grace," 303; and, Johnson, "Original Sin," 326.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH IN

G. C. BERKOUWER

#### Introduction

According to Berkouwer, the concern for the identity of the church, her relevance and significance in the world has for generations stood at the center of intense theological discussion.<sup>1</sup> These issues

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<sup>1</sup>Starting in 1966, some six years before he completed his first volume on the church, Berkouwer wrote two series of articles for the Gereformeerd Weekblad. The first series bore the title "Het prestige der kerk," running from 4 February 1966 to 25 February 1966. It contained four articles dealing with what the "prestige" of the church meant for his time. The second series of articles, entitled "Over de identiteit de kerk," spanned the time period of 3 April 1970 to 22 May 1970. On the importance of understanding the identity of the church, he wrote in 1970, "De vraag is uiterst belangrijk, omdat identiteit ten nauwste samenhangt met *herkenning*. . . . Het is duidelijk, dat we bij zulke vragen in aanraking komen met een probleem, dat velen in onze tijd bezighoudt en het kan zich alles concentreren in de vraag naar de identiteit van een bepaalde kerk, b.v. de Gereformeerde Kerken, al is het duidelijk, dat vrijwel alle kerken bij deze vragen op de een of andere manier betrokken zijn" ("Over de identiteit de kerk, I," Gereformeerd Weekblad, 3 April 1970, 266). "The question [of the identity of the church] is of ultimate importance because identity is most closely connected with her identification. . . . It is clear that with such a question [of the church's identity], we deal with a problem that many in our time have engaged in. It [identity] can concentrate itself in the question of a specific church, i.e., a select group such as the Gereformeerde Kerken. It is clear that virtually all churches relate themselves with this question in one manner or another-AT."

As early as 1954 in Triumph, 9-10, we read, "The proclamation of the Church, her dogma, the authority of Scripture and its proper interpretation, election, the image of God, creation and Redemption - all of these subjects have come to stand in the center of intense theological discussion." In this regard, most of the points of controversy between Rome and the Reformation in Berkouwer's thinking converge on the doctrine of the church. This can be supported by the fact that this doctrine became the center of debate at the Second Vatican Council (Second Vatican Council, 146). All of the winds of change in Roman Catholicism as seen at the Council, holds Berkouwer, impinged on the nature of the church, whether it be her role in the world, the relationship of the episcopacy to the papacy, or the relation of the Roman Catholic Church to the churches outside her communion (Berkouwer, "Reformed View," 7). See also Glenn Hinson, review of

may have lost some of their importance today since not a few have raised the question as to whether the church may not have outlived her usefulness, a criticism expressed not only by those outside the church but also by those within her.<sup>1</sup> Such concerns, among other things, have led the church to be less than certain about her own authenticity and purpose in the world, if not, at times, simply raise doubts about the same.<sup>2</sup> This self-doubt, holds Berkouwer, requires the church to reflect upon her identity, her ways in Christ, and on the central meaning and implications of the message of salvation for the world; in other words, on her nature.<sup>3</sup> Whoever engages in this task is faced with a long series of questions, most of which result from the mere existence of a variety of churches with a multitude of differing views on the essence of the church.<sup>4</sup> "It is essential," Berkouwer warns us, "that in these times the church does not give into defeatism. She must seek for a new understanding and a new experience of being in Christ and what it means for men and women to be part of the fellowship of the

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Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Canadian Journal of Theology 12 (1966): 110; L. Berkhof, "Conflict," 1104; and De Jong, "Conflict," 221.

<sup>1</sup>The church, it seems, has, in the eyes of the world, become powerless because she carries no meaning or relevance for modern society. This attitude has placed the church, in Berkouwer's opinion, in danger of becoming a marginal phenomenon (Church, 99).

<sup>2</sup>Church, 99, 165.

<sup>3</sup>Modern Uncertainty, 77, and Church, 192. According to Bradford, "Council," 84-85, the foundational question for Berkouwer is that of whether Rome is the one, only, and true Ecclesia Christi. Laurence Porter believes that the important issue for Berkouwer is tradition, Scripture, and the nature of the Church ("Council," 239-240). In the opinion of Louis Berkhof ("Conflict," 1104), Berkouwer's discussion with Rome has to do with the nature of the communion of the saints and the Catholic view of the church as the continuation of the Incarnation. All of these admit that the issue of importance for Berkouwer is the nature of the church. For this study, the word nature has to do with what it is that makes a thing itself, i.e., the fundamental characteristics that together define something's identity, in this case the church. The term is used interchangeably with essence and ontology.

<sup>4</sup>Church, 7.

church."<sup>1</sup> "Such questions, however," warns our author, "should be raised only from one's love for the church, for without love for the church one cannot grasp her true nature."<sup>2</sup>

In Berkouwer's view, these many questions may be condensed to three foundational queries as far as the doctrine of the church is concerned. The first of these concerns what the church actually "is", i.e., her nature or essence. This is particularly pivotal given the church's traditional claim to be the expression of a profound mystery,<sup>3</sup> an entity of divine origin having a trans-historical significance, the object of a unique relationship with Christ.<sup>4</sup> The validity of these claims requires that we reflect on the church, since it cannot be denied that much of what the church is stems from these affirmations.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup>Church, 99, 165.

<sup>2</sup>"Critique," 6. From this perspective alone should all questions about the church be raised. For a discussion of the differing views on the nature of the church, see chapter 1 above.

<sup>3</sup>For Berkouwer, the church described as a "mystery" does not imply that her true nature is enigmatically hidden or invisible. Rather, it accents the church as she exists in her concrete reality in the world ("Revelation, II," 23). Hence, when one speaks of this mystery, one must speak of the "empirical" church, i.e., the church which has been revealed by Christ in her full reality for the first time (Church, 9, 89; "Reviewing," 47; Person, 332; Justification, 21; Perseverance, 98; and, Rutgers, "Work," 23). Berkouwer seems to have accepted this definition of mystery for two main reasons. First, he wishes to dispel the idea that the unity of the church can be only realized in the "mystical", i.e., the invisible church (Church, 37-39). Second, his definition of mystery disallows the Roman Catholic identification of the church with Christ, i.e., the church being the prolongation of the incarnation, an idea that he clearly opposes (see for example, Conflict 12, 170-179, 206; Church, 84-92; and Runia, "Conflict," 56).

<sup>4</sup>Ecclesiology, traditionally, holds Berkouwer, speaks of the unique significance of the church, her mystery, her divine origin, her relationship to Christ, her continuity, and her future. Even when we speak about reformation, we are led to questions about the church's nature (Church, 182-183).

<sup>5</sup>Church, 10. The use of the terms holy, apostolic, catholic, and one in describing herself are the proof, in Berkouwer's opinion, that the church claims much about herself and her position in the world. Since these attributes describe the exalted view that the church has of herself, he does his critical examination of the church within the framework of the four-fold classical characteristics of the church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. See also Zachariah, 187.

second question, intimately related to the first, is the problem of how the church can be of service to the world through her proclamation of the gospel, i.e., her function. What is important here is whether the church is related to and concerned with the world and its problems, perplexities, and desperate needs. In this regard, the church must continually ask herself what it means to be a pillar and bulwark, a city set on a hill, the light of the world, the salt of the earth, the household of God in the world, and a refuge for all human needs.<sup>1</sup> The third question has to do with the interconnection of the church's nature and her function. The difficulty here is whether the church "is 'being' or 'becoming' or both."<sup>2</sup>

For Berkouwer, therefore, the primary problems to be faced in considering the doctrine of the church are her nature, function, and the interrelationship of the two. Sidestepping these issues, according to him, is merely the sign of the uncertainty of one's own view about the "continuing significance of the church."<sup>3</sup> Hence, the church must ceaselessly seek to ascertain her own "identity", so that by "enduring from generation to generation and by going forth and producing fruit, she will both deliver and be a clear and unambiguous message to the world."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kromminga, "Church," 203. Note here the two kinds of questions, those of essence (first question) and those of function (second question).

<sup>2</sup>Church, 21.

<sup>3</sup>Modern Uncertainty, 75-76, and Church, 23-24.

<sup>4</sup>Church, 191. How is the gospel faithfully conveyed to those within the church without distortion or heresy, as well as to those in the world that are yet to hear the gospel proclaimed to them so that they may enter into the church? These are the internal and external aspects of the mission of the church.



The Essence or Being of the Church

Attributes and Notes  
of the Church

The distinction between the attributes and notae of the church has played a far-reaching role in the controversy between Rome and the Reformation.<sup>1</sup> The attributes of the church deal with the substance or essence of the church while the notae have to do with her outward, historical parameters. The notae, in this sense, provide the vital link between the invisible (spiritual) and visible (empirical) aspects of the church.<sup>2</sup> The whole reflection on them, in Berkouwer's thinking, reached an apex in connection with "the question of the ecclesia vera."<sup>3</sup> The point of contention was whether the attributes could be considered as empirical proofs of the true church. Roman Catholicism held that the attributes of oneness, holiness, apostolicity, and catholicity were all that were necessary to describe the true church.<sup>4</sup> The Reformers, explains Berkouwer, challenged this assertion on the premise that the only way to determine which church is the true church is to be able to test her in her historical context.<sup>5</sup> Since her

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<sup>1</sup>Zachariah, 187.

<sup>2</sup>See Avis, 7-8, and Johannes Witte, "One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic," in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. E. Quinn and A. Woodrow (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 3-43.

<sup>3</sup>Conflict, 212, and Church, 14. See also Edward Gratsch, review of The Church, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Theological Studies, 38 (1977): 374-375.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, Witte, 4-17, and Eck, Enchiridion, 1.4.v. It is striking in this context that the four attributes of the church were never disputed by the Reformers, who themselves did not opt for another way of describing the essence of the church. It was, rather, the role of the attributes that caused dissension.

<sup>5</sup>Church, 13, 24-25, and Crowe, 143. For Roman Catholicism, according to Berkouwer, the attributes were appealed to as empirical proof that it was the true church. This is demonstrated in the manner Vatican Council I speaks about the attributes of the church as providing the basis for continuity and the credibility of the church. At the same time, Berkouwer believes that this concept is slowly changing in part since Vatican Council II in Roman Catholicism. He even goes so far as to say that the Catholic Church has recognized that the attributes can

attributes belonged to the universal church of all time, they could not to be used to test the church in any localized historical context. The Reformers, therefore, introduced the notae ecclesiae in order to be able to test whether a church was true or not.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the only way of considering the church was through the testing notae of the sacraments, church discipline, and the preaching of the Word of God.<sup>2</sup>

For Berkouwer, the first nota, i.e., the sacraments,<sup>3</sup> are

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be temporarily and partially obscured in the church (Church, 18-19). This has led to, in his opinion, less and less emphasis on the apologetical use of the attributes and the splendor of the church (ibid., 17-18). See also Kromminga, "Church," 204, and Crowe, 143.

<sup>1</sup>Zachariah, 187, and Church, 14-15. This was an attempt on the part of the Reformers to indicate from Scripture which was the true church, since all sects had claimed the name of the church.

<sup>2</sup>Kromminga, "Church," 204. Traditionally, when one deals with Protestant ecclesiology, especially the church's nature, one begins with the notae of the church to determine what she is. As Berkouwer engaged in dialogue with Roman Catholic theologians, he came to more fully appreciate their description of the church in terms of her attributes (see chapter 2 above). Hence, and most likely because of his ecumenical concerns (see chapter 4 below), he structured his understanding of the nature of the church around her four attributes of oneness, catholicity, apostolicity, and holiness in his volume on the church. Since this is the procedure of Berkouwer, I first discuss the notae of the church and then her attributes (see Church, 7-25).

<sup>3</sup>For Berkouwer's definition of sacrament, see Sacrament, 27-28, where he writes, "The word 'sacrament' has come into ecclesiastical and theological language to indicate specifically religious events. Its increasing use has something to do with its root meaning, which indicates the assigning of something to deity (*sacrare*), for example, in the Roman legions or in other connections. The word was used to indicate certain rites of the Church that had particular bearing on the mysteries of faith, so that the term could come about '*mysterium sacramenti*'. The distinction between '*sacramentum*' and '*mysterium*' became flexible, which explains why the Church had a very broad concept of the sacraments for a long time. The word 'sacrament' became a definite part of the ecclesiastical vocabulary, but its meaning was often changed." ("Het woord sacrament is in het kerkelijk en theoloigisch spraakgebruik opgekomen om specifieke kerkelijke en religieuze gebeurtenissen en handelingen van heilig karakter aan te duiden. Dat men hiervoor met steeds groter stelligheid en eenstemmigheid het woord «sacrament» ging gebruiken, vindt zijn aanknopingspunt in de betekenis van dit woord, dat aan duidde een toewijzing van iets aan de godheid (*sacrare*), b.v. in het Romeinse leger of in ander verband. Het woord werd gebruikt ter aanduiding van bepaalde riten der kerk, die in het bijzonder betrokken waren op de geheimenissen des geloofs, zodat men kon komen tot de uitdrukking: «*mysterium sacramenti*». De grenzen tussen «*mysterium*» en «*sacramentum*» werden vloeiend, waardoor het te verklaren valt, dat in der kerk langdurig een grote breedheid in het sacramentsbegrip valt waar te

absolutely necessary to the church.<sup>1</sup> Through them one" participates in her fellowship."<sup>2</sup> The celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper is a response of the believer to the act of God in Christ, a response which restores one's relationship with God and places believers in proper relation with their neighbors.<sup>3</sup> It calls the believer to "publicly proclaim the gospel that brings restoration."<sup>4</sup> The community of believers, then, is in a constant state of activity, proceeding towards

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nemen. Het woord sacrament is voor goed ingeburgerd in het spraakgebruik der Christelijke kerk, maar de inhoud was dikwijls aan allerbi wisseling onderworpen [DE 29-30].") Berkouwer emphasizes the idea of being given to and being done for God when defining sacrament.

<sup>1</sup>Sacraments, 109. The sacraments, for Berkouwer, are both signs and seals, receiving their function from the Word (Providence, 222-223). They are signs and seals of the promises of God (Sacraments, 13). The idea of sign and seal cannot be separated from each other, for both concern the one act of God in Christ in reconciling the world to himself (ibid., 136). Both the signs and the seals are instruments to strengthen faith. The role of the Holy Spirit is to lead the church by means of the word and the sacraments in the communion with the church's exalted Lord (Conflict, 219). This is, in Berkouwer's view, in conflict with the understanding of Roman Catholicism. The distinction between substance and accident is most prominent in the Roman Catholic idea of transubstantiation, where the accidents remain the same (bread and wine) but their substance is changed into the real blood and real body of Christ. From the Reformer's perspective, the accidents vanish but the substance remains (Return, 221). For Roman Catholicism, the sacraments are necessary for salvation since they infuse supernatural grace into the participant. For the Reformers, grace must come by faith (Sacraments, 106-107). Thus, for the Reformers, our trust and faith are directed towards Christ's once-for-all offering on the cross while Roman Catholics "repeat" the sacrificial offering each time they celebrate the mass (ibid., 213). In Berkouwer's view, the sacraments are foundational to the church's unity and intimately related to her ecumenical prospects. Berkouwer's early concern on the subject of unity appeared in Sacraments (1954), which was published in the same year as Berkouwer's more famous book, Triumph. This concern for the unity of the church expressed early in Berkouwer's career would gain increasing importance in his later years.

<sup>2</sup>Church, 141. Berkouwer holds that the correct appreciation of the sacraments is not a matter of theology. Theology can ponder the meaning of the words and of the Lord's Supper as instituted by Christ. Only believing and participating in the sacraments will lead to the true fruit of the Lord's Supper and put one within the context of the believing community (Sacraments, 218).

<sup>3</sup>Sacraments, 287.

<sup>4</sup>"Thought," 31 July 1964, 20.

a goal. That goal is to preach the gospel of reconciliation which brings unity to the church.<sup>1</sup>

The second nota of the church is that of discipline. Berkouwer sees discipline as directed towards repentance and reincorporation into the church.<sup>2</sup> The exercise of discipline finds its background in the penal laws of Leviticus 20, where the people of God have been set apart by his grace for fellowship with him and one another. This is true also of the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> In both the OT and NT, "grace is the origin of discipline" and discipline is done in order to proclaim this grace.<sup>4</sup> It shows that God's mercy does have its limits, since discipline's goal is not ruin but life in fellowship. Discipline, therefore, has to do with the visibility of the church, which is the light of the world. It is the sign of God's mercy in the world and the witness of the restoration of grace. It is possible for

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<sup>1</sup>Person, 169. This unity in the communion of the saints is a result of communion with Christ (Sacraments, 285). Thus, to celebrate the Lord's Supper in division is to despise the church of God and her head, Christ (Church, 41). Here, Berkouwer connects the sacraments with the unity of the church (Sacraments, 282). It is the one faith, Supper, Lord, and baptism that assist one to think of the church as a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Christ. This leads us not to a vague romantic ecumenicity but to the one church of the New Testament (Church, 279).

<sup>2</sup>This is consistent with the Latin root of discipline, disciplina, which means teaching, instruction, or training (see disciplina, in Oxford Latin Dictionary, ed. P. G. Glare [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968], 550). Throughout church history, however, the word "discipline", affirms Berkouwer, is often associated in with punishment, even excommunication. To take this negative aspect as one's starting point is incorrect, since discipline must be seen in the context of a genuine concern for the church, for preserving her along the way of life. This does not eliminate the aspect of punishment, but it does illuminate its significance (Church, 363).

<sup>3</sup>Church, 375. The danger for us is that we forget the relationship between the holiness of the church and discipline. When this connection is forgotten, Berkouwer believes that discipline is objectified and pride and discrimination become the controlling factors in its exercise.

<sup>4</sup>Church, 379, 364. The believers at Ephesus, for Berkouwer, had lost their first love, thus they were judged because they lost their relationship with Christ and their ability to proclaim salvation ("Critique," 7).

the church as the house of God, the temple, the bride of the Lord, the body of Christ, God's light in the world, and the sign of his mercy to become unrecognizable because of the absence of the spiritual character of discipline.<sup>1</sup>

The most important of the notae of the church for Berkouwer is the primacy of the true preaching of the Word of God. Reflection on the true preaching and the Word is necessary because that Word must be proclaimed by the church.<sup>2</sup> For him, "the genuine confession of the Word only occurs when Scripture is applied to the life of the church. This takes place solely as its message is proclaimed."<sup>3</sup> In fact, "the test of all true Bible study and research is whether or not the promise of God in Christ is proclaimed so that all may make a decision for or against the gospel."<sup>4</sup> For this reason, the church cannot be satisfied with a general preaching but seeks to place all of life in this world under the revealing light of the gospel.<sup>5</sup> If she fails here, her message will not call the world to repentance nor will it be relevant.<sup>6</sup> The church in this regard can only be the church when she listens

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<sup>1</sup>Church, 376-380.

<sup>2</sup>According to Berkouwer, one of the most urgent questions of our time is how the Bible is to function in the church ("Hearing," 64).

<sup>3</sup>Holy Scripture, 234-235.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 210-211. This does not imply a devaluation of the church's confession, but it reminds us that the purpose of all theological study is to proclaim the gospel by bringing out the fulness and riches of Scripture about Christ (Person, 96-97).

<sup>5</sup>"Thought, 22 December 1961," 39. Even though Scripture comes as the vox Dei, it only comes through the vox humana. Hence, the preacher must continually study to give the Word of God relevance and meaning in the present.

<sup>6</sup>Holy Scripture, 307, and Church, 302. Krabbendam ("Functional Theology," 309) points out that this gives the Word of God a functional character for Berkouwer. In this view, the nature of Scripture is seen from the perspective of faith which focuses on its content, i.e., the message of the saving grace from God in Christ, and which leads to a doxological response of praise to this message.

attentively to the Word.<sup>1</sup> For Berkouwer, "the confession of the kingship of Christ, or of the unity of the church, or of her task in mission to the world is inseparably linked with reverence for the Word of God."<sup>2</sup> The community that honestly attempts to do all things solely according to God's Word may claim to be the ecclesia vera.<sup>3</sup> Hence, all notae can be reduced to one nota, the Word of God, which tests and judges the church. "The notae - concentrated in one nota - imply a judgment, a testing of the Church. They 'assume a standard that lies far above the Church by which she may be judged by everyone'.<sup>4</sup> The dominant nota of the church, therefore, is the Word of God proclaimed

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<sup>1</sup>"Hearing," 64, and Holy Scripture, 264.

<sup>2</sup>Modern Uncertainty, 84. See also Donald Bloesch, review of The Church, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Christianity Today, 9 December 1977, 47.

<sup>3</sup>Holy Scripture, 80-81. Berkouwer holds that the church herself is not a norm-giving church. Rather, the whole being of the church is in subjection to the canon and can only be revealed under this normativity. Hence, she cannot be "self-authenticating". Her essence cannot for one moment be freed from the one and only decisive reality that can make her truly the church, i.e., the Scripture. See also Kromminga, "Church," 204; De Jong, "Conflict," 217; Eelman, 53-54). Both Eenigenburg (60) and J. Monks ("The Conflict with Rome: A Review," Theological Studies 19 [1958]: 453) remind us that this is one of Berkouwer's basic criticisms of Roman Catholicism in Conflict. The latter has placed its primary authority in the church rather than the Scripture. On this point, the possibility of dialogue with Roman Catholicism remains remote for the Reformation cannot compromise its stand on the authority of Scripture (Conflict [1948], 15-38). However, as time progressed, Berkouwer's dialogue with Roman Catholicism led him to the conclusion that a new movement was striving within Roman Catholicism and was attempting to emphasize what the Reformers had underlined, i.e., the message or content of Scripture, which was God in Christ saving the world (Second Vatican Council [1964], 102-145). This view is reflected in Holy Scripture (especially 77-80).

<sup>4</sup>Church, 15. (De notae - in één nota te concentreren - impliceren een beoordeling, een toetsing van der kerk. Ze «onderstellen toch een maatstaf, die ver boven de kerk ligt en waarnaar zij door iederen beoordeeld mag worden [DE 1:14-15].) See also Holy Scripture, 132, where Berkouwer writes, "If the church does not abide by the Word, she must fall into a type of introspection which only results in a reference to the obviousness of the presence of the attributes. This removes her from the reality of life and from any true introspection. Thus, the church, in the manner of the Reformation, speaks of her readiness to bow to the authority of her scepter, i.e., the message of the gospel contained in Scripture."

and received by the company of the faithful, a Word which involves all believers in the mission of the church.

This element of testing by means of the notae brought an entirely new perspective to the doctrine of the Church's attributes. It directed itself against the practice of verifying the ecclesia vera by appealing to her recognizable and, supposedly unassailable attributes as had been done in Roman Catholicism, which, in Berkouwer's opinion, led to a static ecclesiology that does not allow for a genuine discussion of the ecclesial reality of the church.<sup>1</sup> However, for our author, the Reformer's view of the notae is problematic because they are solely a description of the church's visible, peripheral, and historical aspects but not of her essence per se. For him, the church's attributes of oneness, catholicity, apostolicity, and holiness not only describe her essence but also her empirical historical manifestation as long as the Word is used to determine the validity of the attributes as a description of her historical reality and relate them to Christ's dynamic rule in the church as her head and critic.<sup>2</sup> If they are not subject to examination, then the attributes become static and only lead

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<sup>1</sup>"Church in the Last Days," 4-5. There is a refusal on Berkouwer's part to proceed from an esse ecclesiae according to which the fact that there is a church makes all testing superfluous, and which by ascertaining certain visible attributes concludes that the church is proved as being the church. These notae bring a new element into ecclesiology, making the church a dynamic entity. See also Klug, "Church," 100.

<sup>2</sup>"Critique of Christ," 6-8, and Church, 24-25. What is interesting to note is a shift that Berkouwer has made in the traditional Reformed way of speaking about the attributes and the notae. The Reformers saw the attributes as being the representation of the substance of the church and her invisibility. The notae were seen as describing the historical parameters of the visible church in any given age to determine her veracity. Berkouwer, however, has modified this, most likely in light of his ecumenical concerns especially in regard to Roman Catholicism, and sees the attributes as the substance of the church as informed by the notae. What he has done is blurred the Reformed distinction between the two. The attributes become the historical expression of the church in a given age as long as they are interpreted, informed, and tested by means of the single nota of the Scripture, which brings him closer to the Roman Catholic position, a position that held that the historical ecclesia vera was to be determined by the attributes of the church.

to a legitimization of the status quo.<sup>1</sup> This testing of Scripture, for Berkouwer, is a safeguard from making a distinction between what the church is (the function of the notae) and what it ought to be (the function of the attributes) and allows him to continually focus on the empirical church by converging the attributes and notae into a description of the church in a given historical era.<sup>2</sup> In this way for our author, "the real and visible church comes into focus in contrast to the abstractness of the earlier way of speaking [about the church]."<sup>3</sup> When dealing with the nature of the church, Berkouwer operates from the perspective of the church's attributes which always remain under the control of the primary nota, Scripture.

#### The Nature of the Church Expressed in Her Attributes

There seems to have been a development in Berkouwer's thinking on the relationship between the church's nature and her function from 1948 onward. In Conflict with Rome (1948), he clearly separated ontology and function when dealing with her essence, following traditional Reformed thought patterns.<sup>4</sup> In 1964, when Berkouwer published Second Vatican Council, one begins, in the light of his concern for unity, to see the nature of the church defined in terms of her mission.<sup>5</sup> This view reaches full fruition in his volume on the

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<sup>1</sup>Church, 20-21.

<sup>2</sup>Kromminga, "Church," 204-205.

<sup>3</sup>Church, 18-19.

<sup>4</sup>See chapter 7, "The Communion of the Saints," 179-190, where he discusses the nature of the church as a communion, and chapter 3, "The Guilt of the Church," 52-75, where the topic of concern is the unity of the church.

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, his chapter "The Mystery of the Church" (178-220).



church, where Berkouwer discusses ecclesiology from the vantage point of her attributes.<sup>1</sup>

### Unity and Catholicity

For Berkouwer, the unity of the church is so self-evident that the New Testament rarely mentions it.<sup>2</sup> It is neither "a pluriformity, nor can it rest upon an erroneous understanding of biblical eschatology."<sup>3</sup> Rather, it finds its foundation in the oneness that

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<sup>1</sup>Church, esp. 196-197.

<sup>2</sup>Church, 30, 41-42. The New Testament does speak in the plural about churches, but this does not signify any rupture or disunity, since different groups of believers in different places are meant. Together, these form the one church of Christ. Hence, the only plurality allowed in the New Testament, asserts Berkouwer, is geographical plurality. Berkouwer's concern for the unity of the church occupied his attention for a number of years before he wrote the volume on the church (see, for example, Conflict [1948], 52-75; "Vital Emphases in Contemporary Discussions of the Church," Christianity Today, 19 August 1957, 4; "Reformed View [1964]," 6-8; "Evangelicals [1966]," 18; and "Eenheid en apostoliciteit," Gereformeerd Weekblad, 6 November 1970, 105-106). In Conflict (212-262, especially 213, 217-218), he mentions the problem but sees little hope of any rapprochement between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. However, after years of dialogue, he became increasingly hopeful because of what he saw as a change in Roman Catholicism (Second Vatican Council, 11-56). Thus, he is much more enthusiastic about the unity of the church (Church, 29-104).

Because of his ecclesiological concerns, Berkouwer juxtaposes the elements of the Creed. He emphasizes two of the attributes, those of unity and holiness and connects unity with catholicity because these two aspects of the church are "so much at the center of interest at present" (Church, 25). For Berkouwer, the ecumenical movement has put in the forefront the question of the unity of the church ["What Conservative Evangelicals Can Learn from the Ecumenical Movement," Christianity Today, 27 May 1966, 18-19]. E. R. Hardy, a Roman Catholic, suggests another reason that Berkouwer has chosen to put the attributes in this particular order. It allows him to work toward the expression of holiness as setting apart for mission to the world as the culmination of his understanding of the doctrine of the church (review of The Church, by G. C. Berkouwer, in Theological Studies 30 [1979]: 378). We would agree with this observation for reasons that become clear as we proceed in our study of Berkouwer's view of the nature of the church.

<sup>3</sup>Church, 53. See also Sacraments, 288, and Sanctification, 63-64. The common meaning of pluriformity is the disclosure of the essence in various harmonious forms. Unfortunately, the different "forms" of the church are anything but harmonious. Hence, in Berkouwer's view, a pluriform church remains incomplete because her form is division and disunity ("Evangelicals," 18; Church, 62; and, "Pluriformiteit," Gereformeerd Weekblad, 13 November 1970, 113-114). The problem in an erroneous eschatology is that unity tends to be realized only when Jesus comes, or in that of an invisible church. This

characterizes the relationship between the Father and the Son and is directly connected with their unity in bringing salvation to human beings. The members of the Godhead are the ones who "continually bring together that which is scattered, divided, and disunited into the one fellowship of the church."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the oneness of the church can never be the result of "human effort" nor is it a unity of the "worldly type."<sup>2</sup> Rather, it is a part of the plan of salvation, a way of revealing God's ultimate intentions in a world characterized by disunity, i.e., to bring this world into oneness.<sup>3</sup> The church's oneness is the message of the gospel and is brought about as the result of the reconciliation of all to God and their neighbors.<sup>4</sup> Unity

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is to be rejected in Berkouwer's opinion because it ignores the present disunity and lessens our guilt over division in the church, which one must never minimize. See, for example, "Evangelicals," 20; Church, 33-36; Sanctification, 63-64; Vunderink, "Kerk," 25; and Klug, "Church," 100. Notice that issue of the denial of the unity of the church appears quite early in Berkouwer's thinking when speaking about the second blessing (Sanctification [1949], 64).

<sup>1</sup>"Calvin and the Church," Free University Quarterly 6 (1959): 250; Modern Uncertainty, 84; Perseverance, 139-140; and Church, 77, 48-50. The gathering of the church in unity only occurs as the gospel of salvation is proclaimed from Scripture and humans respond to it. For Berkouwer, if Scripture becomes a problem in the church, inevitably the church and Christ become a problem also. It is only as we submit ourselves to the message of Scripture that unity can occur. This is no small task. The deplorable divisions of the church attest to this. The challenge here is to subject ourselves to the one message of the gospel ("Evangelicals," 48).

<sup>2</sup>"Vital Emphases," 4-5. The unity of the world is a compromise between parties where each side gives up certain truths they hold for the sake of peace. But the church can never compromise. Whoever seeks the unity of the church for Berkouwer must consider the being of the church, her hope, and her calling as a single-voiced unity where one cannot doubt the content of her witness.

<sup>3</sup>Hence, it is understandable that for Berkouwer the question of the visible unity of the church is a pertinent matter for her since we live in a time when the divided world is confronted with various problems threatening its unity. It is only natural then, that the world should look to the church as an example of how visible unity can be experienced ("Evangelicals," 19 and Sacraments, 282).

<sup>4</sup>Becoming a believer, therefore, is an invitation to be connected with the fellowship of the church and her visible unity (Church, 141). This, he holds, is exactly the position of Calvin. For Calvin, the unity of the church is based upon the clearness of the gospel calling people to the one flock under the one Lord ("Calvin,"

becomes meaningful only as the church lives her message every day in the midst of the disunity of this world.<sup>1</sup> The single witness of the church that comes "without dissonance but with harmony and symphony" thus summons up reactions of faith in and acknowledgement of God's salvation from those of the world.<sup>2</sup> "The church, in this light," according to Berkouwer, "cannot be viewed as a hidden, mysterious reality in the present, full of riches but which the world cannot perceive. The decisive call to unity in Christ's prayer is so that the world might believe. The function and purpose of the church is to relate God's unifying message of reconciliation to the world by her own example."<sup>3</sup>

Related to unity is the church's attribute of catholicity. Just as there is one church in unity so there is one church which can be called catholic or universal.<sup>4</sup> For Berkouwer, this catholicity

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251). This view is a development of Berkouwer's understanding of election as being an election to a visible oneness in the community which he expressed in his volume on election in 1955 (Divine Election, 310).

<sup>1</sup>Modern Uncertainty, 85-86, and "Emphases," 5. Christ's prayer is directly related to the specific goal that the world might believe (John 17). This connects the unity of the church with the world in such a way that it becomes a letter to be read by all men (Church, 44-45). This, incidentally, is why the controversy in Roman Catholicism about the relation of the churches outside of her is such a vital issue. It has to do with the manner in which the church lives her unity ("Reformed View," 7). See also Eelman, 53; De Jong, "Conflict," 217; and Dyck, 168. De Jong reminds us that for Berkouwer, dialogue is not a sign of weakness but rather a recognition of the seriousness of the division of the church and its influence on the proclamation of the gospel ("Conflict," 217).

<sup>2</sup>"Vital Emphases," 4.

<sup>3</sup>Church, 45.

<sup>4</sup>"Calvin," 249. The church is catholic solely because catholicity is the gift of heaven (Work, 226). Hence, it can only be achieved by the Holy Spirit working in the church. It is he who, by bringing the pure understanding of God's salvation and its concomitant obligation to share it so that the borders of the church might be enlarged, makes catholicity dynamic rather than static (Church, 126). One of the faults of Roman Catholicism for Berkouwer is that it has remained static about catholicity. It has claimed to be the true church on the basis of her historical presence in all the world in the form of the structure or the institution of the church. Her catholicity, therefore, is ascertainable and verifiable to all. Since this is lacking in other churches, it is concluded that Rome must be the true

encompasses two closely interrelated aspects, i.e., a quantitative or geographical feature and a qualitative or doctrinal facet.<sup>1</sup>

Quantitative catholicity refers to the church in her concrete presence throughout the world while qualitative catholicity suggests a deep unity between the churches on the basis of a true confession founded upon Scripture.<sup>2</sup> Catholicity is a confession of both the church's own identity and her purpose in this world. It continually reminds her that the gospel must enter every age, in the spacio-temporal sense as well as in the doctrinal one.<sup>3</sup> These two aspects of catholicity enable the

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church. This, however, in Berkouwer's opinion, eclipses the role of the Holy Spirit in the church and destroys the dynamic nature of catholicity.

<sup>1</sup>Church, 131, 191, 106 (especially n. 3), and Heideman, 65. From this perspective, the words ecumenical and ecumenical movement for Berkouwer cannot be seen only in connection with the expansion of the gospel, although this is certainly an integral part of the meaning of these words. But, this expansion is not only in breadth but also in depth and quality of relationships established with the Lord and with our neighbors. In the past, when speaking of catholicity, we have tended to be fascinated only by geographical expansion and not the depth of the meaning of salvation. Here Berkouwer has modified the traditional Reformed understanding of catholicity with its emphasis upon the historical visibility of the church to include the element of doctrinal unity as part of catholicity. What he has done is emphasize the earlier use of "catholic" in terms of doctrinal wholeness (E. F. Harrison, "Catholic," in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter Elwell [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984], 199 and, R. P. C. Hanson, "Catholicism," in A Dictionary of Christian Theology, ed. Alan Richardson [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969], 47-48). This understanding allows him to speak about the essence of the church as its function (see below on the essence of the church as its function). For further study regarding the issue, see, for example, Küng, Church, 296-319; Dulles, Catholicity, 3-30; and, Erickson, 1129-1146.

<sup>2</sup>Zachariah, 188, and Vunderink, "Kerk," 25. Edward Gratsch (375), a Roman Catholic, adds a third type of catholicity which he terms "continuity" (Review of The Church, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Theological Studies 38 [1977]). Here, Gratsch holds that Berkouwer denies all claims to unchangeable continuity on the basis of charism or office. Continuity in Berkouwer's understanding for Gratsch is based upon fidelity to God's Word. Here, Gratsch reminds us that for Berkouwer, the attributes of the church expressed in the Creed are to be seen as the historical manifestation of the church under the careful testing eye of the Scripture, i.e., the one true nota of the church.

<sup>3</sup>The gospel enters into any given age in the spatio-temporal sense as the church proclaims the gospel to all so that they might be saved. In the doctrinal sense, it is the church's fight against heresy that permits her to spread the true message received from Christ at the beginning of the church to her concrete historical situation (thus

church to stand in the midst of life, relevant to the world but not relativized by it.<sup>1</sup> Hence, she is neither a group of like-minded initiates accessible only to those who are disposed to becoming her members nor an aristocracy of a certain type or class of people. Rather, the church breaks down barriers of race, class, and time, and passes beyond her own boundaries to reach out to those around her so that they too can realize the significance and become a part of the catholicity of the church. It is only in this context that the description of the church as catholic becomes meaningful.

#### Apostolicity and Holiness

Related intimately with Berkouwer's concept of qualitative catholicity, which emphasizes the doctrinal unity of the church in her universality in the world, is the attribute of apostolicity. This attribute protects "the continuity of the message of the gospel" and guarantees that it is the original one given to the church by God.<sup>2</sup>

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connecting the catholicity of the church to her apostolicity--see below on the apostolicity of the church). These two related features of catholicity protect the church from being bound to a particular time or culture and at the same time enable her to be relevant in her age.

<sup>1</sup>This provides a corrective against those who call for an anti-institutional spiritual church over against the concrete historical church. If one opts for the spiritual church, it can bypass the depth of catholicity. It is for the sake of proclamation that the church must be concrete and appear in history. This precludes any spiritualization of the church in Berkouwer's eyes (Church, 122-123). Furthermore, the church must be careful that she does not add anything human to the message she bears nor must she reduce the gospel and change the message. Rather, she must continually seek to understand what the gospel means to her age and then share that meaning with the world (*ibid.*, 191-193). She must also ask herself in what ways she has been a hindrance to those who have remained outside of the church (*ibid.*, 151). The church cannot function here as a fearful border guard, but as one who brings good tidings (*ibid.*, 162-163). Although the danger exists that the church will allow the gospel to be interpreted by the times, it also faces the risk of not carrying out her mission because of her fear. When this occurs, the church, in Berkouwer's eyes, is no longer the church.

<sup>2</sup>Church, 226, 255. Apostolicity protects the message of the gospel from foreign elements or heresy, which menace the very essence of the church (*ibid.*, 116). The Roman Catholic view of heresy is that which departs from the church while the Reformers, according to Berkouwer, who, in his opinion, have truly understood Scripture on this point, see heresy as a departure from the Word of God. This was a major

This is important for Berkouwer since the church can only be legitimate as it reflects the original prophetic-apostolic gospel and submits herself to its normativity.<sup>1</sup> Apostolicity implies that the church is always placed in the "revealing light" of the gospel so that on her part, there is a "constant readiness to be corrected and called back from wrong paths."<sup>2</sup> She must continually reflect on the apostolic gospel found in Scripture to verify whether or not the message she holds and proclaims is still in line with the essence of the gospel.<sup>3</sup> But, Berkouwer also underlines the fact that apostolicity has a functional nature. Since the gospel's commission to service begins with Christ's calling of the twelve as apostles to go forth and preach the kingdom of God, the church, as the progeny of Christ, is called and sent to confess the apostolic message to the world.<sup>4</sup> Her legitimacy and verification come from the faithfulness with which she witnesses to the world that original message.<sup>5</sup>

If apostolicity is related to qualitative catholicity, holiness could be considered to be closely connected with quantitative

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point of controversy between Rome and the Reformation (Tanis, 22).

<sup>1</sup>See Zorn, 6, for further explanation.

<sup>2</sup>"Reformed View," 8.

<sup>3</sup>Church, 302, 183, and Zorn, 6.

<sup>4</sup>"Thought," 24 May 1963, 40; Church, 205-207; and Work, 220. In this regard, for Berkouwer, the essence of the church can only be rightly expressed when the church is seen as the legacy of Christ and not the legacy of the apostles, for it is Christ who founded her and not the apostles. This is not to deny that men have played a significant role within the church nor her apostolic attribute. But the role of men is always subjected to the role of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in guaranteeing the truthfulness of the message the church is called to proclaim. Even the establishment of the offices of the church are subject to be corrected by the apostolic proclamation (Second Vatican Council, 166). They are based, emphasizes Berkouwer, on the office of the Messiah. It is Christ and his office of Messiah that has authority over all offices of the church. Christ's reign through the offices of the church is that which was overlooked by Roman Catholicism (Work, 77). See also Bloesch, 47, and Klug, "Church," 101.

<sup>5</sup>Church, 203-204, 243.

or geographical catholicity in Berkouwer's thought. For him, the holiness of the church is set in the context of the election, calling, and mercy of God. The church is bought by the blood of Christ and participates in the salvation accomplished by him. She is called to holiness through God's gracious act in Christ that reconciles the world to himself.<sup>1</sup> Holiness in relation to this electing call of God, for Berkouwer, involves a "separateness".<sup>2</sup> It is a separateness produced by a "radical transition from the former manner of life to a new life."<sup>3</sup> However, rather than emphasizing the isolation and estrangement of the individual believer, holiness stresses one's experience within the community of the church.<sup>4</sup> Christians in their

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<sup>1</sup>Perseverance, 107. The church is most vulnerable to criticism from the world when she neglects her holiness (Church, 335). Berkouwer time and again points out that in the light of divine electing grace, the biblical prophets have emphasized the specific responsibility of the people of God to be holy. There can be no indulgent tolerance of sin in her midst (*ibid.*, 358). Because this summons to holiness is grounded in God's gracious election, there is clearly no suggestion of one's achievement nor one's inherent quality as its basis. The point of Paul in Romans 9 to 11 when discussing election is that election is from grace and not works (Return, 336). Thus, nothing can be added to the salvation that Christ has provided for us (Sanctification, 26-27).

<sup>2</sup>Sanctification, 10, 64, and Church, 80. On the one hand, it is not a separateness in the sense of isolation since everyone has a valuable place to hold within the body of Christ. On the other hand, the church is not a self-contained unit isolated from the world but it stands in a concrete God-willed relationship to it.

<sup>3</sup>Berkouwer deplores the fact that people have given up on the belief in demons and the corruption of the human heart because of the evolutionary thought of the 19th century. Man is no longer a sinner, but he simply has not reached his potential for good ("Climate," 3). This has led people to ignore their personal guilt by "explaining" evil away, thus obscuring the grace that sets them free from guilt ("Satan," 18). This considers sin as a corpus alienum and causes one to lose one's orientation to the gospel. It was easy, therefore, to reject Christ's abiding in man ("Orthodoxy," 20). It is this rejection of Christ that needs radical transition.

<sup>4</sup>Divine Election, 309; Sanctification, 53; and, Work, 226. The focus on the church as a gathering of individuals thinking only about their own personal salvation has had, according to our author, a major influence on Protestantism (Modern Uncertainty, 81-82). For Calvin, the reformation is a reformation of the church and not an individualist movement which attempts to detach members from the church ("Calvin," 247). In this vein, Berkouwer exhorts us to remember that in the universal human experience, the deeds of one man may have far-reaching consequences for other men and sometimes for a host of other

holiness cannot be isolated from either their relationship with God nor from that with their neighbor, for they depend on both.<sup>1</sup> Hence, holiness is the setting apart of the church in the present for a newness of life in Christ. The course of the church's whole life is now oriented to "following the will of the Father" and includes the willingness to "follow in the footprints of Christ."<sup>2</sup> Thus, in Berkouwer's opinion, holiness in Scripture points not only to a setting apart for a newness of life but also to a setting apart for a particular

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men. Lewis Johnston (323, especially n. 36) underlines the fact that Berkouwer accepts Ridderbos' interpretation of Romans 5:12 who underscores that the union between the individual and the community was so strong that the whole group could be seen as acting in the single individual. Although in the original this is understood in terms of the relation of Adam with his posterity, the principle has been specifically applied by Berkouwer to his understanding of the corporate nature of holiness. The sin of one man sullies the body of Christ (Church, 344). To set the individual over against the universal is to create a false dilemma (Return, 62-63). Thus, when participating in the Lord's Supper, one is to automatically think of the church as a holy congregation of true believers, all together expecting their salvation in Christ, all sealed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Since there is one Supper and one ecclesia Christi in the New Testament, there can be no individualistic enjoyment of the Lord's Supper, for in it, communion with Christ and our fellow men takes place (Sacraments, 279).

<sup>1</sup>Divine Election, 310; Holy Scripture, 264; Church, 215; and Anthony Hoekema, "Berkouwer on the Image of God, Part II," Reformed Journal 8 (June, 1958): 12. The unity of the individual and of the church is grounded in the unity and oneness in Christ. There is one elect cornerstone and one elect people. Here the term "people of God" demonstrates the fulfillment of the individual within the context of God's community. This is why Berkouwer holds that we must be subject to the body of believers and to one another within that body. The individual does not disappear behind the vague contours of a totality but reaches his fulfillment when operating within the body (Church, 77). Paul's view of the church, as Berkouwer sees it, is strongly anti-individualistic. The church does not consist of monads. She is a fellowship in which all suffer if one suffers (ibid., 81, and Holy Scripture, 263). There is, therefore, no distinction between the believers (fideles) and the church (congregation fidelium) (Church, 180), and we can better appreciate Berkouwer's emphasis on the holiness of the corporate nature of the church.

<sup>2</sup>Person, 250-256, and Church, 331.



purpose.<sup>1</sup> This definition of holiness is based upon Christ's being set apart for his mission to the world.

This sanctification [Christ's mission] does not imply a change from a sinful to a holy state but a separation to a task, a sanctification to the service of the holy work of salvation. . . . When in the annunciation of the Messiah's birth mention is made of his holiness, we see therein the preparation for the fulfillment of his office . . .<sup>2</sup>

The church's purpose takes its concrete form in service for the Lord because "she, in every aspect of her existence, is summoned to this service."<sup>3</sup> Far from being a passive observer of God's action in the world, the church is called to involvement and engagement with the world and human life in all of their dimensions. The setting apart to

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<sup>1</sup>"Het gaat in die heiliging niet om een overgang uit een zondige toestand in een staat van heiligheid, maar [but rather] om een afzondering [separation, setting apart, put aside for a special purpose] tot een taak, een wijden tot de dienst van het heilige werk der verlossing. . . . Wanneer in de geboorte-aankondiging van de Messias gesproken wordt over de heiligheid van de Messias, dan zien we Hem hier in zijn toebereiding tot de vervulling van de ambt . . . [DE 137]." Thus, the Father's sanctification of Christ is a setting apart of him for the fulfillment of his office as Messiah and second Adam. Likewise, as Israel's existence was given as a sign intended to lead the nations to turn to Israel's God, the task of the New Testament church is of a similar type (Church, 404). The difference between the task given to Israel and that of the church is that the church has been told to "go forth" and actively proclaim the gospel of salvation whereas Israel's witness was done from the perspective of others coming to her (ibid.).

<sup>2</sup>Work, 128-129 and also 316-318.

<sup>3</sup>Return, 198. The gospel's message to the sinner is not without obligation any more than the call from darkness to the service of God is (ibid., 386). The peace of mind that the gospel gives does not allow us to deteriorate into the superficialities of bourgeois living while neglecting the obligation of the gospel (Providence, 181). Salvation makes a demand on the whole believer. The sign of the believer's transformation and even his future glorification, which has not taken place yet, is already evident in the call to service within the bonds of communion with the Lord. This is the view of the Reformers when they testify that the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all men (Divine Election, 130). This emphasis leads Berkouwer to focus on holiness in its relation to the mission of the church. In the New Testament, he claims, there is no hesitation about the meaning, right, and obligation of the church for mission (Church, 318, 355, 397, 409). She is the voice sounding in the world calling the one flock to one discipleship, proclaiming the gospel to all nations so that they might be able to participate in her life and fellowship. Through this proclamation, the church is gathered from every nation and people (Work, 198-199). Hence, the missionary dimension of the church is perceived as a sign to all nations, a magnet to draw all men to God (see Zachariah, 189).

holiness, then, is inseparably connected with concrete life here on earth. It is within the context of the deeds of holiness that the church becomes visible in this world. The "church indeed becomes herself" as she fulfills her obligation to become involved with human life.<sup>1</sup>

#### Summary

In this section, we have considered Berkouwer's view of the nature of the church expressed in her attributes as found in the Creed. For our author, they represent the church of all times and describe the historical concrete church, but only as these qualities of the church remain under the testing of her one true nota, the Scriptures. Her unity has to do with the depth of the internal connection of the churches scattered throughout the world, a unity which human beings experience when they have been reconciled to both God and their neighbors by Christ.<sup>2</sup> Integrally related to this oneness is the catholicity of the church, which has to do with the breadth of her geographical expansion as well as her doctrinal unity. Apostolicity guarantees the originality and truth of the message of God in Christ reconciling the world to himself which the church proclaims. Holiness, especially in its sense of separation, deals with the church and her willingness to follow the truth of that apostolic mission in service for the Lord, a service which is done from within the community. All of the attributes are to be tested by Scripture. They refer to the church as

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<sup>1</sup>Church, 417, 36, 316-319. Thus, aware of simul justus et peccator, the fight against sin and weakness, error and heresy is for the express purpose of proclamation and mission (Klug, "Church," 101). The church, then, is to act in such a way as to not obscure the light of divine grace and mercy. It is light to which she has been called out of darkness and light she wishes to make shine for all (Church, 382). This removes holiness from the personal realm and stresses holiness as a task rather than making a statement concerning personal sin.

<sup>2</sup>See Tangelder, "Kerk," 17, who charges that Berkouwer's emphasis upon the attributes of the church is a strong and eloquent plea for a visible unity.

she lives in the world. Since, for Berkouwer, these attributes are intimately related to how the church lives in the world, we must now consider the function or the mission of the church as he understands it.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Function of the Church

The church's function raises the question of the significance of God to this shattered world. Does the gospel have meaning and worth for our time? At the same time, does the church have the courage and the right to preach the living God in the midst of this world, a world that is increasingly secularized?<sup>2</sup> The greater the distress of the world, the greater the need for it to hear the comforting and disturbing message of the gospel.<sup>3</sup> Since the church is the body of Christ, the responsibility of sharing that message in this world unequivocally falls on her. "The church of Jesus Christ," holds Berkouwer, "is bought by his blood and participates in the salvation accomplished by him. It is the redeemed church called to action in this world."<sup>4</sup> Thus, there is a mandate for the church to leave the "ghettos of Christianity" and to go into the world with a strong confession, a confession that impinges upon

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<sup>1</sup>"Orthodoxy," 16; Work, 227; and Sanctification, 24-25. What the church does, or, in other words, how she lives in this world, is founded upon what one holds the church to be. In this sense, the function and the essence of the church are interrelated.

<sup>2</sup>Providence, 8-9, 17-22. Such questions are asked at a time when many words of the traditional Christian vocabulary have disappeared: sin, neighbor, responsibility, etc. (Modern Uncertainty, 68).

<sup>3</sup>"Silent God," 9, and "Thought, 4 July 1960," 40. For Berkouwer there is a line of increasing uncertainty from the past to our time. In all ages the problem of uncertainty and doubt has threatened human life. Yet, since it brings certainty to human life, the preaching of the gospel is significant in every era (Modern Uncertainty, 49).

<sup>4</sup>Perseverance, 107. Yet, this is not done in her own strength since it is Christ who provides for the gathering, protecting and supporting of his church as she witnesses of him in the world (*ibid.*, 147). The same challenge faces both Protestants and Roman Catholics, i.e., the preaching of the gospel. This common mission has brought them closer than they have ever been before ("View," 8).

people's lives and answers their deepest needs.<sup>1</sup> The church, then, is placed in the world not as a "passive observer but as a diligent activist," involving and engaging herself with the whole of human life in all of its dimensions in all nations.<sup>2</sup> "She must reach every field of human life, forgetting none of her neighbors, even if they are her enemies."<sup>3</sup> She should continually fix her eyes on her geographical expansion as well as the doctrinal depth of her message.<sup>4</sup> If she does not "the church unchurches herself," for without mission the church cannot be the church.<sup>5</sup>

Whatever the church does in connection with her mission is directly related to Christ and his salvation.<sup>6</sup> The content of the message that she bears is that of God's love demonstrated in the reconciliation brought through Christ's blood.<sup>7</sup> However, the church

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<sup>1</sup>"Reviewing the Proofs," Christianity Today, 5 November 1971, 54, and "Universalism," 6.

<sup>2</sup>Divine Election, 236, and Providence, 246.

<sup>3</sup>"Orthodoxy," 17-18. See also Modern Uncertainty, 73, and, Providence, 17. The everywhere of the preaching of the gospel, for Berkouwer, cannot be denied (Return, 130, and Triumph, 277).

<sup>4</sup>"Silent God," 8; Church, 108; and Zachariah, 188.

<sup>5</sup>Second Vatican Council, 250; Return, 133; Work, 341-342; Church, 8-9, 196-197; and Geursen, 89.

<sup>6</sup>Sanctification, 26-27; Work, 220; "Revelation," 15; Sin, 222; "Reviewing," 46; General Revelation, 225-226; and Person, 40. When people come to the decision to follow Christ, they are given a call to serve God by spreading the good news of salvation to their neighbors. We are to be lights in the world, fulfilling the new commandment, so that the true light might shine. There is, for Berkouwer, no greater responsibility than being in the world but not of it (Return, 287). This is the meaning of the term Christian church--she must let her light shine (Modern Uncertainty, 79).

<sup>7</sup>Person, 264; "Climate," 4; and Justification, 77. The focal point of the message of salvation is salvation in Jesus Christ (Sin, 222). The proclamation of Christ is the announcement of the time of salvation. The cross and resurrection are central here. Even the wrath of the Lamb is to be seen within the context of his salvation (Work, 369). Jesus Christ and his redemption alone can save humanity (General Revelation, 225-226). Salvation, therefore, is not from man but strictly from the mercy of God (Person, 139). Every attempt of man to create his own righteousness leads to a dead end (Church, 246).

can ill afford to speak of "forgiveness, life, or grace without mentioning guilt, death, judgment, and being lost."<sup>1</sup> Her message must lead to a confession of guilt so that men and women can live in faith out of the riches of reconciliation.<sup>2</sup> It is no "abstraction nor philosophy" but the witness to God's redemptive mercy working in concrete life, a witness which compels the believer to testify that God is the sovereign ruler over the affairs of people and nations.<sup>3</sup>

For Berkouwer, then, there is no dilemma between election to salvation and election to service.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the church has her

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<sup>1</sup>Sin, 201, 220-221; "Universalism," 6; Modern Uncertainty, 69-70; and "Critique," 6. Scripture and the faithful preaching of the Word warn us against excusing sin. The Bible finds no rational explanation for it, but shows us that through the power of Christ we can overcome evil ("Satan," 19). Whenever the gospel is preached, sin is exposed and every excuse laid bare (Sin, 317).

<sup>2</sup>Justification, 167; Providence, 265; "Temptation," 6; Sin, 195-196; and "Revelation," 17-18.

<sup>3</sup>Person, 139; Return, 128-129; and Boer, 61. This relates the gospel to eschatology, which our author holds to be part and parcel of the church's confession of redemption ("Church in the Last Days," 4, and Church, 195). When Christ, explains Berkouwer, rose from the dead, the last days had come upon the church and the time had come to preach the gospel to all nations under the power of the Holy Spirit, thus forever linking eschatology and proclamation ("Revelation, II," 23). After all, the preaching of the gospel to all the world is one of the signs of the end (Providence, 187). The very meaning of the proclamation is that the believer is called to salvation in a framework that includes the prospect of a new heavens and a new earth (Return, 231, and "Thought, 4 March 1957," 40). It is precisely because of her eschatological expectation that the church has much to do with this world. Our hope for the future becomes the motivation for the proclamation in the present. While she awaits the eschaton, the church is tested by the use of her talents, in her preaching of the gospel, and in her daily work to see if she is ready for the eschaton. For Berkouwer, eschatology is not a kind of futurism. It leads to responsibility for the here and now ("Church in the Last Days," 5). The tie between eschatological expectation and mission is clearly indissoluble. If the church fails to understand its mandate in this area, she inevitably, for Berkouwer, wraps herself up in her internal problematics and fails to be a vibrant witness to and for Christ.

<sup>4</sup>"Climate," 17. The calling of the church and of theology for Berkouwer is to enter into life's struggles in order to serve the gospel. Hence, the term "Christianity Today" is not a slogan but a program and a task we should take willingly upon ourselves when we become Christians. Note that this statement was made in 1956, and provides the seed idea of the importance of mission which reaches its mature form in Berkouwer's volume on the church.

election to thank for her existence and mandate for mission.<sup>1</sup> She is gathered around Christ by election and assigned and empowered to testify to it.<sup>2</sup> Because of Christ's resurrection, the church, in the totality of her existence, is summoned to serve the Lord.<sup>3</sup> Discipleship, lived in the service of God, is living within the context of the true human life and the gift of salvation.<sup>4</sup> It touches the whole life and implies that the church should always be ready to make a "defense of the gospel to every one who might call to account the reason for her hope."<sup>5</sup>

How, then, is this quantitative and qualitative expansion of the gospel carried out? Christianity is a dynamic message that must be proclaimed in order that it might bring the blessing to the world that God designed it to deliver. The witness that we carry to the world is

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<sup>1</sup>Perseverance, 238, and "Doctrinal Reaction," 10-13.

<sup>2</sup>Sanctification, 188; Perseverance, 108-109; Church, 90, 207; Zorn, 6; Rogers, Confessions, 141; and R. Swanton, review of Divine Election, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Reformed Theological Review 20 (1961): 61. In the New Testament, empowerment contains implicitly and explicitly a being sent by someone in authority, in this case, Christ.

<sup>3</sup>Return, 197-198, and Man, 230-231. The gospel's message to the sinner is not without obligation. It is a call to God's service, or what Berkouwer holds to be the way of sanctification (Return, 386). Life in the world becomes the service to God and to one's neighbor ("Divine Revelation," 23). Thus, the community of believers is in a constant state of activity, serving the Lord in humble submission to his will (Return, 113, and "Calvin," 249).

<sup>4</sup>To be sanctified means to live gratefully in virtue of the fact that Christ has forgiven our sins and that the believer should tell others about this good news (Sanctification, 66).

<sup>5</sup>"Modern Concept," 10; Holy Scripture, 350-351; and Church, 233. While the foundation of the church's mission is the event of salvation through Christ, the motivation for answering this call to service is rooted in God's sovereign grace through which he has forgiven us in Jesus Christ, and by which he creates a willingness to serve. The inner compassion produced by Christ in the life of the believer allows us to serve our fellow man freely (Conflict, 86; Church, 400; and Work, 47). It is this freedom of service that raises the most important question that any congregation can ask, i.e., whether its works flow from the motivation of the love of Christ and the faith that that love produces. If we lose the vision of the love of Christ, we lose our motivation to participate in the mission of the church ("Critique," 7, and Church, 408).

just that, a witness of what God has done and is doing on this earth.<sup>1</sup> What is important is "not that our preaching be done with great eloquence or carefully worded arguments but that the church speak her message so clearly that a child can understand and not misunderstand it."<sup>2</sup> Christians are to tell others of the forgiveness that God has provided in Christ and the reconciliation that this brings in our relationship with God and with our neighbors.<sup>3</sup> To make sure the clarity of the message is heard, the church must herself also act in such a way as not to obscure the message of divine grace and mercy by which she was called out of darkness into light.<sup>4</sup> "The truth of the gospel is only believable and effective in the total life of the church, in her preaching and witnessing, in her acts and avoidance of acts, in her song and works, in her service and sacrifice, if she is seen in her self-giving service to the dispossessed."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Calvin," 249, and Modern Uncertainty, 59. We are not, in Berkouwer's opinion, defenders of God's business on earth in the sense that his kingdom relies on our arguments or our abilities. Through the power of the Spirit the preaching of the gospel becomes effective. This does not mean that apologetics is needless. What is emphasized is the fact that God is the basis and power for mission ("Current Religious Thought," Christianity Today, 30 March 1959, 39, and Perseverance, 205).

<sup>2</sup>Modern Uncertainty, 83.

<sup>3</sup>"Silent God," 8; Justification, 68; and Muller, 398. The gospel, then, is to be spoken, proclaimed, and preached in the world as an appeal to faith to accept the provision God has made for our salvation (Providence, 265, and Church, 73).

<sup>4</sup>Church, 382, and Second Vatican Council, 253. The church has the responsibility to live her message everyday in the world so that the world will see the gospel in action. This binds her to a real and concrete ethic based upon Scripture (Second Vatican Council, 52). If the Word of God alone is proclaimed, without corresponding deeds, the church will be led to ignore the practices of life in the concrete existence of man. Constant reflection on the Word in Berkouwer's opinion is what keeps the church from seeing her preaching deteriorate into an ineffective proclamation (Church, 302).

<sup>5</sup>Modern Uncertainty, 85-86.

The Church: Essence as Function

In the previous sections, we considered Berkouwer's understanding of the essence and function of the church as he reflected upon her attributes. It should have become obvious that there is a definite connection between the two since both end at the same place: the mission of the church. Here, we stand at the core of Berkouwer's understanding of the nature of the church. At the risk of being repetitive, we wish to explore more fully what we have only briefly addressed, i.e., the intimate relationship of the essence of the church to her function, thus demonstrating its importance in Berkouwer's thinking. This is done from the perspectives of anthropology, election, and the nature of the church as function.

Anthropology and Ecclesiology

The secular view of humanity, explains Berkouwer, ignores that which is most important in understanding man,<sup>1</sup> i.e., his relationship with God.<sup>2</sup> Because of this neglect, human beings have also become

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<sup>1</sup>"Man" is used in the generic sense of referring to all of humankind and not as a term denoting the male gender of the human race as I did in chapter 2 when discussing the doctrine of anthropology (see chapter 2 above).

<sup>2</sup>The searchlight of contemporary interest concentrates on man, i.e., on living man as he acts in love and hate. This interest, according to Berkouwer, is always on the concrete man, never on an ontological grasp of him (Man, 12-13. Berkouwer insists that man should not be the subject of abstract thinking. One can see the anti-metaphysical orientation of our society and its effect upon Berkouwer's theology of man. This anti-metaphysical bent matured and became one of the foundations of his understanding of the church and theology). It is Sartre who has set the stage for the idea that man must "blaze his own trail" in freedom because there is no divine power in the world. Thus, no matter how many disappointments we suffer, one's confidence in the goodness of man apart from God remains highly optimistic as men reach to fulfill their own destinies ("Current Religious Thought," Christianity Today, 7 January 1957, 39). Man must be converted and brought back into relationship with God in order to understand himself properly, i.e., that he is a sinner who needs reconciliation to himself, God, and his neighbor ("Anti-Semitism: To the Gas Chambers Again?" Christianity Today, 29 February 1960, 3).



divorced from their neighbors.<sup>1</sup> For Berkouwer, the estrangement of humans from their fellow men and the lack of recognition of humanity's relationship to God held by modern science is contrary to the teaching of Scripture, which emphasizes both.<sup>2</sup> From this perspective, he has felt it necessary, in his anthropology, to stress the image of God in man.<sup>3</sup> The depth of man's meaning can only be found through the restoration of the imago Dei which encompasses both one's relationship with God and with one's neighbor.

Thus it is understandable that various presentations of the preserving grace of God have not only pointed to the limiting power of his regulations for the individual, but have also specifically mentioned the relations between man and fellow man; which is undoubtedly related to the fact that we may not think of man's humanness in an individualistic manner. Humanness is preserved in the numberless relations between man and fellow man. Man is a creature, and this very creatureliness is as such the opposite of an individualistic autonomy; and this is understandable first of all in view of man's dependence on God, but also, in this dependence, in man's dependence on and relation to his fellow man.<sup>4</sup>

Since the restoration of the image of God in humanity is the renewal of one's relationship with God and a concomitant call to serve one's neighbor, it is only natural for Berkouwer to see people in terms of "discipleship," a "discipleship" lived in the love of God that reaches out to one's neighbor. "Man," therefore, according to our

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<sup>1</sup>Sanctification, 151, and David Powlison, "Which Presuppositions? Secular Psychology and the Categories of Biblical Thought," Journal of Psychology and Theology 12 (1984): 275.

<sup>2</sup>"Modern Concept," 8-9; "Revelation," 21; and Sanctification, 84. Here, Berkouwer appeals to such texts as 1 Tim 6:11, 2 Tim 3:17, Acts 17:23-25, 2 Cor 3:18, Col 1:15, Psalm 139:21-24, Psalm 8, and Jer 10:23. For a more comprehensive listing of the texts he uses for establishing his view that man should not be considered outside of his relationship with God, see, Man, 33-34, 43-45, 215. On the texts concerning man's relation with his neighbor, see Man, 350-353, 358-363.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, "Modern Concept," 8-10; Man, 67-147; and "Revelation," 22.

<sup>4</sup>Man, 179. See also "Revelation, I," 17; and "Anti-Semitism," 4. This was, for Berkouwer, the purpose of the Incarnation (Smedes, "Berkouwer," 82). Berkouwer's view of man was already present in his book Faith and Justification [1949] (33-34) but was developed more extensively in Man [1957].

author, "in the totality of his existence is summoned to the service of the Lord."<sup>1</sup> A person cannot be understood apart from the perspective of their calling.<sup>2</sup> It is precisely the reestablishment of the image of God in humans which leads the church to mission. It creates a need for human action in the church because the believer has been called to serve his neighbor by sharing the message of election.<sup>3</sup> Thus anthropology provides the motivation for mission. In order for the image to be restored so that humanity can live in proper relation to God and neighbor, people must have opportunity to hear the gospel. The church becomes the context in which humans assume the role of agent to bring election and grace to the world.

#### Election and Ecclesiology

If anthropology produces the foundational motivation for mission for Berkouwer, election provides its message. Election is God's gracious act in Christ to restore the image of God in human beings<sup>4</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup>Return, 197-198. See also, "Modern Concept," 10; "Critique," 8; "Orthodoxy," 17-18; Work, 231; Perseverance, 99, 239; and General Revelation, 331-332.

<sup>2</sup>Justification, 196; "Modern Concept," 11. "It is the grace of God," writes Berkouwer, "which restores life, which takes human nature into his service and gives it a place in the Kingdom" (Man, 350). See also, Cameron, 76-77, and Hoekema, "Berkouwer II," 13.

<sup>3</sup>Man, 98-99, and Riches, "Common Grace," 304.

<sup>4</sup>In Calvinism, the meaning of election has usually taken the form of limited atonement, in which salvation is only for the elect of God. It is closely related to the doctrine of predestination. In this view, election is seen as an eternal decree which provides for both the salvation of the elect and the judgment and destruction of the reprobates (Erickson, 826-829; John H. Leith, Introduction to Reformed Tradition [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981], 103-108; and Loraine Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941]). For Berkouwer, this is unacceptable since it negates the need for a genuine preaching of the word, denigrates the importance of the human decision in salvation, and turns God into an arbitrary God who is the author of sin, leaving man with no responsibility for his guilt (Divine Election, 67-68; Half-Century, 82-83; Man, 350; Church, 400-401; Sanctification, 26-27; and "Doctrinal Reaction," 12-13). Berkouwer defines election as "the preference of Christ for the lost, for publicans and sinners" (Divine Election, 317 and Half-Century, 93-94). It is an act in which Christ leads his people out of sin and into a relationship with himself and with their neighbors (Conflict, 78-79).

incorporates individuals into the church.<sup>1</sup> This view of election led Berkouwer to accent the universal outreach of salvation and stress the preaching of the gospel as a call to decide in faith for salvation. This emphasis is necessary because it is only through the preaching of election that the grace of God is revealed in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

This indissolubly connects election and the church's service in the world. Because she is elected, the church is led to evangelism.<sup>3</sup> She is compelled to preach the gospel because she knows that her election has come through the gracious mercy of God. When she comprehends the fact that her election is from grace and undeserved rather than it being a fatum, the church is able to correctly understand her service in the world.<sup>4</sup> The gospel of election makes the church

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See also Klooster, "Perseverance," 13). It does not, as such, appoint people to their individual destinies, but rather summons them to conversion (Half-Century, 91). Election, in Berkouwer's opinion, includes the election of individuals to conversion and of the church to service. The latter is much emphasized in the last chapter of Divine Election (307-330), which Berkouwer entitles "The Great Misconception," the misconception being that election to salvation and to service are two separate entities. This fallacy is a result of holding election to be a decretum absolutum, a necessitas rerum, or a potentia absoluta (ibid., 67-68, 172).

<sup>1</sup>Church, 30-31; Work, 198-199; and, Sanctification, 23). Election is the foundation of Christ's gathering, protecting, and supporting of his own (Perseverance, 147, and Divine Election, 309). The church has God's election to thank for its existence. She has her being and lives within the context of faith produced by it (ibid., 108-109).

<sup>2</sup>Modern Uncertainty, 49, and Divine Election, 162, 218-219. See also Cameron, 77, and Bloesch, 47. God's gracious election is the only message that can give hope to the sinner.

<sup>3</sup>Perseverance, 108-109.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, Return, 329, 357-358. See also Swanton, 61; Rogers, Confessions, 141; and Walter J. Kukkonen, review of Divine Election, by G. C. Berkouwer, In The Lutheran Quarterly 13 (1961): 370. Election in this sense becomes a reminder of God's grace and is a guarantee that the church will remember her missionary calling in the world.

free for service, and she can enter unafraid into her mission to call all to become a part of God's community.<sup>1</sup>

The Church of Christ is compelled thus to preach the gospel. . . . But the Church does not, because of the world's sin, stop preaching salvation, and it does not therefore abandon the world. It may not do so on the basis of election, since the Church itself knows that it too has been called out of darkness into the light by a free and sovereign election. This constant reminder is the only guarantee the Church has against all passiveness and against all deterioration of its missionary calling in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Individuals become part of this ecclesial community through a decision of faith.<sup>3</sup> The word of the cross places before them the decision concerning the redemptive acts of God, i.e., to accept or reject the election of God in Christ for salvation.<sup>4</sup> If election is accepted by a decision of faith on the part of the hearer, then it is all too natural for Berkouwer to emphasize the mission or function of the church as its most critical aspect for the only way that one could hear the gospel message is to have it proclaimed by the church.<sup>5</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup>Recent Developments, 74, and Divine Election, 158. This call to service constitutes the riches of grace (Sanctification, 188).

<sup>2</sup>Divine Election, 252-253 and 327.

<sup>3</sup>Justification, 40-41. Cameron (76) maintains that Berkouwer's understanding of the role of the decision of faith by humans leaves open the possibility that man's act in salvation is important and not absorbed or destroyed by the divine sovereignty and superiority.

<sup>4</sup>Person, 40, and Divine Election, 241. Election and its preaching do not, according to Berkouwer, switch off human reactions. Thus, there is a responsibility on the part of the hearer of the gospel to respond to Christ in faith. This does not put divine election and human responsibility in competition. The divine activity is the basis of man's activity in salvation (Church, 153, and Cameron, 76-78). Faith, therefore, merely accepts election but it is not a precondition for salvation. This would make salvation dependent upon man and his work of faith rather than on God's grace. The life of the believer is from first to last embraced by divine grace (Justification, 17-18). Yet, faith is necessary to election because it accepts the gift of God in Christ. Berkouwer, at this point, is quite close to the Arminian position.

<sup>5</sup>Work, 294; Church, 141; Triumph, 17, 273; and, Smedes, "Berkouwer," 71-79. This, as we have already seen in the last chapter, is consistent with his rejection of reprobation and election as an eternal decree. An eternal decree, for Berkouwer, automatically leads to a deterministic causality which deprives us from any certainty regarding our salvation and negates any reason for proclamation of the gospel (Triumph, 282). This has been considered by some to be his

has led Berkouwer to combine the function and essence of the church so that her nature actually becomes her mission.<sup>1</sup>

#### Essence is Function

Berkouwer understands the essence of the church to mean the church as she is in herself. It is that which makes the church what she is.<sup>2</sup> But for him, describing the nature of the church can never be a theoretical contemplation of her "being". This would produce an isolated essence resulting in a church secluded from the world. In Berkouwer's opinion, the reality of the church in time and history precludes such thinking about her as an abstract ideal. The church is not an alien being but the church that is in Corinth or in any other historical place. She is made up of concrete living humanity, a congregatio fidelium, a communio sanctorum, who accept her reality in history as esse ecclesiae.<sup>3</sup> In spite of this assent, however, without a view of the Lord as her Head, the church cannot comprehend her true substance, since Christ alone provides the foundation for the essence of the church in her function. We are subject to the one Lord of the one church which is gathered into him to be sent out to share his message.

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greatest contribution to the understanding of election (Smedes, "Berkouwer," 78, for example) and by others as a departure from Reformed thinking (Baker, 170-175, Klooster, "Predestination," 89-90; and Rushdoony, "Election," 22, for example).

<sup>1</sup>Thus, election appears to be an important key for understanding the relationship of function and essence in Berkouwer's doctrine of the church. Election for him, belongs to the essence of the church because it has to do with what the church is and who belongs to her inner core, i.e., who the church consists of (Divine Election, 11-12 and Half-Century, 78-79). Berkouwer also holds that election touches upon the task of ministry and its responsibility to share it with the world (Divine Election, 102).

<sup>2</sup>Church, 344. The attributes of the church are of her substance (*ibid.*, 16-17). They are used in the sense that they exist in themselves and are self-sustaining but are also under the tutelage of Scripture (Providence, 51).

<sup>3</sup>"Orthodoxy," 18-19, and Church, 29, 52, 88-89, 9.

The church must never forget that it is Christ who brings his scattered flock together through the preaching of the gospel.<sup>1</sup>

Being, then, for Berkouwer, as far as the church is concerned, means that the church both "abides (in Christ) and testifies (of Christ)" with a living and real testimony.<sup>2</sup> The key here is that there is an unbreakable link between "being, abiding, and fruit-bearing in relation to the Headship of Christ over the church."<sup>3</sup> Even the church's reflection on her unity, catholicity, apostolicity, and holiness starts from the origin and mystery of the church found in her relation to the Head. The mystery of the church for Berkouwer does not mean that the church is abstract or unhistorical, but that by God's revelation in Christ, she is now being made known to all men.

One cannot speak of a church which has its own mystery, its own secret, of a church without windows. The entire gospel is contrary to such a "secret" inner-being. The secret of the church has something, yes everything, to do with its visibility. That (secret) has been frequently brought to speak in connection with the unity of the church (so that the world can recognize . . .) but it has something to do with all aspects of the life of the church (AT).<sup>4</sup>

Hence, there is little room in his ecclesiology for the traditional Protestant emphasis upon the visible and invisible church. Only the empirical church is important for Berkouwer because the world must see her in the backdrop of real life.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Work, 226; "Critique," 7; and Church, 34, 50.

<sup>2</sup>Providence, 179.

<sup>3</sup>Perseverance, 101, 114, and "Revelation, I," 17.

<sup>4</sup>"Het prestige der kerk, I," Gereformeerd Weekblad, 4 Februari 1966, 217. (Er geen sprake van een kerk, die haar eigen verborgenheid heeft, haar geheim, van een kerk zonder vensters. Heel het evangelie keert zich tegen zulk een "geheim" van het binnen-zijn. Het geheim van de kerk heeft iets, ja alles te maken met de zichtbaarheid. Dat is dikwijls ter sprake gebracht met de eenheid der kerk [opdat de wereld erkenne . . .] maar het heeft met alle aspecten van het leven der kerk iets te maken). See also, Work, 59-60; Justification, 160-161; and Perseverance, 224-225.

<sup>5</sup>Church, 9, 89; "Calvin and the Church," 251; Second Vatican Council, 188; and Conflict, 74.

In Berkouwer's view, an appeal to the hidden church does not leave the church open to the testing and the admonition of the Lord. The Reformer's emphasis on the visible/invisible church, he explains, was not to escape to an "ideal" church but, on the contrary, to reject the church as the civitas Platonica.<sup>1</sup> In the more recent past, the concept of the invisible church has been used as a retreat from the problems that the church faced in her concrete life, her difficulty in living up to her expressions of the attributes, especially those of unity and holiness, and in correctly understanding eschatology.

Thus, in connection with unity, an appeal to the invisible church led the church to excuse her disunity, her guilt in creating it and to teach that she will only realize her essence of unity in the eschaton. This produced an attitude that caused one not to grieve over the disunity in the Scriptural one church, one body.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, in regard to holiness, an appeal to an invisible church led to sin not sullyng the invisible but only the visible church.<sup>3</sup> This insulates the church from sin.

As for eschatology, an appeal to an invisible church has two dangers. First, both eschatology and the church can be depersonalized and the church assumes the stance of spectators watching a series of events with no understanding. Second, eschatology and church can be personalized and the historical concrete age the church lives in is completely disregarded. In both instances, the proclamation is divorced from real life and the church reverts to quietism in its mission.<sup>4</sup>

Since it is not possible, in Berkouwer's thinking, to view the church apart from concrete life in this world, i.e., to see the church's

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<sup>1</sup>Church, 38, n. 23.

<sup>2</sup>"Evangelicals," 18-19, and "Vital Emphases," 4-5.

<sup>3</sup>"Calvin," 251, and Church, 169.

<sup>4</sup>Return, 218, and "Evangelicals," 19-20.

life as being in herself, her essence can only be understood in relation to her function.<sup>1</sup> Without the preaching of the gospel, the church could not be the church because the world would have no way of seeing either her or the gospel in real life.<sup>2</sup> In short, the destiny of the church lies in her witness-being.<sup>3</sup> The being of the church, then, is encountered most clearly for Berkouwer in the idea of the church as the light of the world.<sup>4</sup> One can only speak meaningfully and fruitfully about the being of the church in the context of her directedness toward others, which expresses itself in the proclamation of the message by the church as she does mission. The church shares her being in the world when she makes the gospel proclamation audible so that men might hear and join her community. The only way that the church remains herself is within the framework of subjection to Christ and obedience to his call for her members to participate in their neighbor's lives.<sup>5</sup> The responsibility of the church for mission does not injure her ontos but raises it above misunderstanding. The image of the body of Christ in this light cannot stand apart from the mission of the church, for if it does, the church is removed from being the church as the New Testament

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, "Orthodoxy," 20; Perseverance, 107; Return, 132-133; and "Revelation," 23.

<sup>2</sup>Church, 99, especially n. 65, and 391-393.

<sup>3</sup>Triumph, 108, 119, and Conflict, 35. Berkouwer is in sympathy with Karl Barth at this point when the latter emphasizes that the line of the triumph of grace goes from election to witness concerning the grace of God. Berkouwer advocated the nature of the church as function as early as 1954 when he wrote his famous book on Karl Barth (The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth). Throughout the intervening years since writing Triumph, and especially since his attendance at Vatican Council II as an observer, Berkouwer has accepted the view of the church as witness-being as his own understanding of the church (see, for example, Second Vatican Council, 213-214; "Vital Emphases," 4-5; and "Church in the Last Days," 3-5).

<sup>4</sup>Church, 252-255.

<sup>5</sup>Modern Uncertainty, 79; Justification, 196; Church, 130 n. 81; and Divine Election, 218-219. Although the Reformers were accused of attacking the ontic reality of the church, Berkouwer sees this concern as an attempt to call the church to realize her true being by proclaiming the gospel to all humans (Church, 19).



knows her.<sup>1</sup> Hence, in Berkouwer's ecclesiology, the function of preaching the gospel belongs to the essence of the church and actually becomes her nature. Therefore, the essence of the church is her function in our author's view.

#### Conclusion

For Berkouwer, two questions are of vital importance in ecclesiology: "What is believable about the church as a mystery and a transcultural-historical continuity?" and "Is the church really related to the world and its concerns and worries?"<sup>2</sup>

In answering these two questions, there can be for him no theoretical contemplation of the being of the church in herself as an isolated essence or mystical reality. Rather, there is an indissoluble connection between the essence of the church and her function. It is precisely this connection that keeps the church from vagueness, abstractness, and mysteriousness (inability to be understood). The church as the body of Christ signifies her essential functionality in Christ. Thus, function and being are not in antithesis with each other. Function is the mode of reality of the church. One cannot reflect on the being of the church outside of her task. Clearly, her function as her essence, for Berkouwer, is the Scriptural way of speaking of the church.<sup>3</sup> For the church to truly be herself, the two emphases, her being and her function in the world, dissolve since the church as the

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<sup>1</sup>Church, 19, 84, 91, 313.

<sup>2</sup>Kromminga, "Church," 203.

<sup>3</sup>Man, 111, and Church, 45-49, 89, 196-197. The New Testament is concerned with a visible church which does not remain hidden but is revealed, a living epistle of Christ through the preaching of the gospel. This places the church's being within the contours of indicative and imperative, linking her being (indicative) with her proclamation (imperative). Muller (398) points out in this regard that Berkouwer's view of the attributes of the church is that they are the locus of the divine redeeming work in the world which desperately needs God's forgiveness, and as such, they describe the function of the church.

church of Jesus Christ is the light of the world and the salt of the earth. The church's being must be connected with her function through the proclamation of the gospel in order to make her fruitful in the world and real to it. Therefore, Berkouwer defines the nature of the church in terms of her function.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE ESSENCE OF THE CHURCH AS FUNCTION:

#### A CRITIQUE

##### Introduction

Whatever position one assumes in regard to Berkouwer's view on the nature of the church, one must agree with Bloesch that Berkouwer is a theologian who deserves to be taken seriously. The questions he raises often challenge long cherished notions of what the church is while at the same time reminding us that our traditions must be subjected to Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

Given Berkouwer's considerable influence, his perspective on the nature of the church merits careful evaluation. Such a task calls for specific criteria. One could attempt to assess the inner consistency of our theologian's understanding of the church, to determine how his views provide new solutions to old problems, whether or not he has been faithful to his own historical and theological tradition, establish whether he has sought to alter it, and whether that change is positive or negative. But to determine whether a change is positive or negative is dependent on upon the theological position of

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<sup>1</sup>"Church," 47. See also Osterhaven, "Election," 51; Geursen, 89; Krabbendam, "Functional Theology," 309-310; Bromiley, "Scripture," 42; and Timmer, 20. Zachariah (187) holds that Berkouwer's volume on the church makes a substantial addition to the increasing literature on the church in the modern world because it makes a necessary bridge in the gap between the ideal and the empirical church. On the other hand, Richard Muller (399) considers Berkouwer's volume on the church as a significant contribution to the 20th century ecumenical debate which, however, falls just short of being a basic treatment of ecclesiology in and for the Reformed churches because it does not deal with the issues that are important to the Reformed doctrine of the church such as the visible and invisible church and the relationship of Christ as head of the church.

the evaluator and therefore can be considered a rather subjective enterprise.<sup>1</sup>

Since our author professes to be both a confessional and Biblical theologian,<sup>2</sup> it would seem appropriate to critique him from the perspectives of Scripture and the historical confessions to which he ascribes. To evaluate him in regard to his faithfulness to the latter, however, may lead one back to the difficult task of evaluating the relative benefits of such revisions. A critique of Berkouwer from this perspective is further complicated by the fact that he himself admits that "confessions can never exhaust the wider meaning of Scripture as they are human expressions of truth" and are thus "vulnerable to defection from the truth."<sup>3</sup> Hence, it appears that the Scriptures remain a suitable criterion with which to appraise him and his understanding of the nature of the church. This, of course, is done from the perspective of my own perception of the Scriptural testimony on the doctrine of the church. I take a high view of Scripture, holding it to be the infallible revelation of God's will, reliable in all things, though not necessarily inerrant, as the latter term is popularly understood.<sup>4</sup> My approach to Scripture may be best described as that known as the historical-grammatical method, rather than the historical-

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<sup>1</sup>In Berkouwer's case, some have seen his views as a breath of fresh air for theology, particularly as they relate to Scripture and the doctrine of election (see, for example, Rogers, Confessions, 134; Rule, 42; Berkhof, "Justification," 598; and Cameron, "Reformation," 73). At the same time, others have challenged the claim that Berkouwer is a genuine representative of the Reformed tradition (see, for example, Bogue, Hole, 4; Bolt, "Principle," 31, n. 52; Riches, "Common Grace," 303; and Johnston, "Original Sin," 326). Each of these theologians have read the same works of Berkouwer and yet agree or disagree with him on the basis of their own understanding of the issues involved.

<sup>2</sup>See pages 52-54.

<sup>3</sup>"Authority," 203, and "Thought," 24 May 1963, 40.

<sup>4</sup>See, for instance, Erickson, 221-240, and Harold Lindsell, The Battle for the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

critical method as it is commonly understood.<sup>1</sup> I will follow the most obvious meaning of the text, unless the text itself and the general consensus among "Evangelicals"<sup>2</sup> indicates the language to be figurative.

The Metaphysical and Empirical Church

Our time is a time of functional emphasis when things are viewed in empirical terms rather than from an attempt to describe them in terms of their very existence.<sup>3</sup> In his desire to keep the church relevant and comprehensible for modern man, Berkouwer has, as we have seen, accented the empirical over the metaphysical and tended to converge the categories of ontology and logic with those of function and utility. For Berkouwer, "when one reflects upon the Church, one may not concentrate on an idealistic picture or on the question of how, "properly speaking," the Church ought to be. . . . [T]he intention of the *credo ecclesiam* is to point to nothing other than what is customarily called the 'empirical' Church."<sup>4</sup> He acknowledges that

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<sup>1</sup>For further explanation of what is meant by the historical-grammatical method, see Gerhard Maier, The End of the Historical-Critical Method, trans. Edwin Leverenz and Rudolph Norden (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), 80-93; Walter Kaiser, "Legitimate Hermeneutics," in A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 111-141; Erickson, 102-104; and Gerhard Hasel, "General Principles of Interpretation," in A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, D.C.; Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1974), 163-193. For a summary of the historical-critical hermeneutical method, see Edgar Krentz, The Historical-Critical Method (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

<sup>2</sup>I use the word Evangelical to distinguish that group in Christendom whose dedication to the gospel is expressed by a personal faith in Christ as Lord, and whose understanding of the gospel is defined solely by the Word of God. See Robert K. Johnston, Evangelicals at an Impasse (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 3.

<sup>3</sup>Timmer, "Theologian," 19-20. Note that this stress is true not only of theology but of society as well (Erickson, 1028-1030).

<sup>4</sup>Church, 8-9. See also Lewis, "Categories," 251-255 and Barnes, 3, where it is demonstrated that Berkouwer has even removed the Bible from the realm of the philosophical and scientific and placed it in the arena of the functional. In fact, Berkouwer can be regarded as one of those modern evangelical theologians who hold that metaphysical

there are at least two basic questions confronting ecclesiology. The first has to do with the claim of the church to be the expression of a profound mystery, an entity having a divine origin with a unique relationship to Christ and having a trans-historical continuity. This speaks to the question of what she is. The second asks whether the church is really related to and concerned with the world and its problems, i.e., what she does.<sup>1</sup> The key here for Berkouwer is to fit the church's "is" and "does" together into a single understanding in order to resolve the tension between the two.<sup>2</sup> This is done in an

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ways of describing reality such as changeless being and ontological entity are in conflict with central categories of the Christian message because they do not deal with concrete life (Lewis, "Categories," 250-251). Ontology here is used in the traditional sense of the study of transcendent reality, especially being and inquiry into the ultimate nature of reality in order to understand what, in our case, makes the church the church. (See D. B. Fletcher, "Metaphysics," in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter Elwell [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984], 711-712; Johann Lotz, "Metaphysics," in Philosophical Dictionary, ed. W. Brugger and K. Baker [Spokane, Washington: Gonzaga University Press, 1972], 247-249; and Angeles, 135). Empirical is used in the sense that what we know about something comes from our experience of it, i.e., we know the church by what we can observe of her in this world. (See D. A. Rausch, "Empiricism, Empirical Theology," in Elwell, 353-354; Josef Santeler, "Empiricism," in Brugger, 108-109).

<sup>1</sup>This is the classical problem of ecclesiology, i.e., how the essence (the first question of what the church is) relates to function (the second question of the church's relation with the world). For recognition that the two questions exist, see, for example, Church, 9-10, 45, 49, 196-197, 303. When dealing with any subject, especially that of the church, one basic issue is the relationship of form and function. In describing this relationship, models are usually introduced which attempt to describe and define the harmonization. Avery Dulles provides us a good example of this in his book, Models of the Church (New York: Doubleday, 1987, exp. ed.). The purpose of models in Dulles' opinion is to explain what we know about the church or to explore that which we do not know (Models of the Church, 24-25). Berkouwer has likewise attempted to provide us with a model for understanding the church. He gives us a mission-based model for dealing with the essence of the church. While Berkouwer's view shows similarities with Dulles' Herald model of the church (ibid., 76-88), he differs from it in some respects. Berkouwer, in some regards, has moved beyond the Herald model because he has involved the being of the church as the foundation for mission, where Dulles' Herald model only stresses the relationship of the Word to the church as the foundation for mission. Berkouwer also has made a contribution to the Protestant understanding of the church when he relates her being to her function.

<sup>2</sup>Church, 8-9. See also Kromminga, "Church," 204-205. All ecclesiological questions are related to the church's actual history, her concrete existence in the world, her visibility and accessibility.

effort to rescue the church from contemplative reflection, a reflection which removes her from her earthly historicity.

There is an urgent warning in these many-sided descriptions [of the church in the NT] against allowing the description of the Church as the body of Christ to stand alone. Otherwise, as the history of exegesis and dogmatics makes clear, it becomes static and appears to be an object for 'contemplative' theology, which removes 'the Church' far from the earthly Church as we know her and as she stands out in the various images of the New Testament.<sup>1</sup>

Since the church must be visible, function as essence logically follows, for we only "see" the church as she works in history through her ministry of the proclamation of the gospel. Besides, any appeal to the being of the church outside of her connection with the task assigned to her allows one to justify her disunity by either appealing to the oneness of the invisible rather than the visible church or by assigning her unity to the eschaton.<sup>2</sup> Both positions, in Berkouwer's opinion, ignore or downplay the church's guilt and responsibility regarding her disunity.<sup>3</sup>

What Berkouwer is attempting to underline is the fact that the church is called to apply the gospel message to her concrete everyday life.<sup>4</sup> In Luke 10:25-37, for example, we find the parable of the Good Samaritan. This parable emphasizes the obligation to one's neighbor in

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<sup>1</sup>Church, 84. (In deze veelzijdigheid en variatie van omschrijvingen ligt een dringende waarschuwing tegen elke verzelfstandiging van de omschrijving van de kerk als lichaam van Christus. Ze krijgt daardoor - gelijk in de geschiedenis der exegese en der dogmatiek duidelijk blijkt - iets statisch en maakt de indruk van een voorwerp te zijn van een «schouwende» theologie, die aan «de kerk» iets irreëels geeft, haar althans ver verwijderd van de kerk, de aardse kerk, gelijk wij die kennen en van de kerk, gelijk in het N.T. voor ons staat in al de beelden . . . [DE 1:102].")

<sup>2</sup>"Calvin," 251; "Evangelicals," 18-20; "Vital Emphases," 4-5; "Church in the Last Days," 4-5; and Church, 37-48.

<sup>3</sup>For further study, see the section on the catholicity and unity of the church in chapter 3 above. We return to this problem when discussing Berkouwer's theological problems in regard to the unity of the church on earth.

<sup>4</sup>Vunderink, "Verontrusting," 24.

light of the love that one has for God.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the acceptance of Christ is never merely an "intellectual or an emotional experience" because the church's salvation has practical implications for the way that she lives.<sup>2</sup> She is to witness to the world because of her intimate relation with it, her testimony being directly related to both the love her members show toward one another and the love that they demonstrate to those outside her boundaries.<sup>3</sup> This compassion she shows towards everyone because she knows herself to be sinful and that her relationship with God results from the removal of her guilt brought about by the gift of Christ.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the church has no claim to judge or condemn others, whether or not they accept the salvation offered to them. She is only to proclaim the message of hope to them. This is what Berkouwer means when he speaks of the witness-being of the church as an analogia relationis. The very being of the church lies within its witness function. Thus, when reacting to Karl Barth Berkouwer writes, "in short: the destiny of the church lies in its witness-being. The line of the triumph of grace receives an extension here--from election to the witness concerning God's grace."<sup>5</sup>

For Berkouwer, then, the purpose of one's existence is to have a relationship with God and with others.<sup>6</sup> To establish these

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<sup>1</sup>This implies that the church must live the Christian life in this world but not become tainted by its practices. For further Biblical support, see, for example, 1 Cor 5:9-11; Eph 4:1-7, 20-32; Eph 5:1-31; Gal 6:10; Matt 22:34-39 and 1 Cor 12:25-26.

<sup>2</sup>Lloyd-Jones, "Faith," 108. This seems to be the intent of James 1:22-27 and 2:14-26. This is consistent with Berkouwer's understanding of sanctification and holiness, which for him, have to do with being set apart for a task, the task of proclaiming the gospel of Christ (see on holiness in chapter 3).

<sup>3</sup>See John 13:35, chap. 17; and Gal 6:10.

<sup>4</sup>Powlison, 275.

<sup>5</sup>Triumph, 108. See also Church, 391-393.

<sup>6</sup>Man, 194-223, esp. 195-196; "Modern Concept of Man," 7-9; and Barnes, 117.



relationships, one needs redeeming grace which only God grants through Christ.<sup>1</sup> Yet this grace, explains our author, is not given for curiosity's sake. By accepting it, one joins the Christian community, the church, and is enabled to come into the proper relationship with Christ as well as serve one's neighbor, i.e., to share the gospel so that other people too may be restored to fellowship with God and their fellow humans.<sup>2</sup>

The church, therefore, is not a social institution nor does she merely proclaim a social gospel.<sup>3</sup> She is not a club of people meeting together for their mutual enjoyment since it is only in and through her that the grace in Christ in the world is revealed.<sup>4</sup> The church's aim in meeting together and in being in this world is to engage in evangelism through her witness and proclamation. Berkouwer thus points out to us that there is no dilemma between election to salvation

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<sup>1</sup>"Changing Climate," 4, 16-17; "Thought," 7 Jan 1957, 39; Justification, 25-36, esp. 29-30; Conflict, 76-112, esp. 87; Work, 253-342, esp. 254-255; Election, 132-171; and, Riches, "Common Grace," 304. We must keep in mind that grace is defined by Berkouwer as God's moving into human life to create a koinonia of love and service between us and himself and us and our neighbor (Sanctification, 47-67; Church, 313-333; Election, 132-171; and, Smedes, "Berkouwer," 88). This, for Berkouwer, is the meaning of the restoration of the image of God in man (Man, 67-118, "Modern Concept," 8-9, and the section on anthropology in chapter 2).

<sup>2</sup>Bogue, "Evolution," 162-163; De Jong, 217; and Boer, 61. Only by keeping in mind the purpose of the church as the restoration of a relationship can Christ never be lost sight of or separated from the church (De Waard, 57). The danger of Roman Catholicism and its understanding of the church as Christ's continuing incarnation is, for Berkouwer, that Rome loses sight of the fact that the church is a communion only when she is subject to Christ and not equal with him.

<sup>3</sup>This is not to say that the church has no social obligations. The church herself is in some ways called to meet social needs of her members (See for example Acts 2:42-47; 2 Cor 8:1-15; and, 1 Tim 5). The church, in the wider sense, has an effect on and must deal with social problems such as crime, hunger, injustice, corrupt politics, war, and etc. (See David Moberg, The Church as a Social Institution [Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962]). This, however, is not to be confused with the church proclaiming a social gospel where the gospel is one mainly of social justice.

<sup>4</sup>Smedes, "Berkouwer," 71-75. For Berkouwer, the purpose of providence and hence the church is the preservation of the world for God's redemptive purpose.

and election to serve.<sup>1</sup> The church is the locus of the divine redeeming work in the midst of a human race desperately in need of God's forgiveness. She must give herself sacrificially in service to the dispossessed through the proclamation of the gospel which cannot penetrate human life apart from this experience. As she becomes the bearer of good tidings, the church receives direction and meaning when she gathers.<sup>2</sup>

In accenting the empirical church, Berkouwer has directed us to the fact that the church's historical reality is an important factor in her witness. Her being is closely connected with her doing, thus emphasizing the importance of the church's task and demonstrating that the church's very essence and purpose has to do with her proclamation of the salvation accomplished in Christ to all. Accepting this salvation means that a person is elected by God to eternal life. Our author, however, holds that election is not only election to salvation, but also to service. Thus, the church is under divine mandate to both appropriate the forgiveness of God and apply it to her every day concrete historical life. She cannot merely think of herself as some esoteric entity which can ignore actual life as lived in the here and now.

Clearly, Berkouwer's convergence of the empirical and metaphysical aspects of the church has unmistakable advantages, particularly in underlining the relevancy and practical implications of the church as she works for and in this world to build up the kingdom of God. Yet it is not without its difficulties. In his desire to

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<sup>1</sup>Swanton, "Election," 61. It is election that gives hope to sinners that they can be saved and prepares them to share that same hope with others so they too may enter into election. The kerygma and therefore election is a summons that the church is called to give (Smedes, "Berkouwer," 78-79). See also Murray, "Election," 43; Klooster, "Perserverance," 168; and, Van Til, "Sovereignty," 38.

<sup>2</sup>Muller, 398-399, and Bloesch, 47. While she is unworthy to fulfill this task because of her sin, the church remains God's instrument to bring the gospel to humans.

accentuate the historical concrete church, the Dutch theologian tends to downplay the New Testament's witness to the spiritual church, which while only seen through the eyes of faith, is still considered, in Scripture, to exist, and which is important from the perspective of demonstrating that the goal of salvation is to bring into one unity the assembly of angels (the heavenly church) and her empirical counterpart (the earthly church).<sup>1</sup> This appears to be the intent of Heb 12:22-24 when it declares that the believers have come to Mount Zion, the heavenly (epouranio) Jerusalem which is the city of God, while the believers, called the church of the firstborn (ekklisia prototokon), and which consists of those who have their names written in heaven, join the angels in joyful assembly.<sup>2</sup> The problem for Berkouwer is that he has tended to focus on what the church is and minimize what it will become in the future.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, he hardly addresses in some depth such questions as how the NT church relates to Israel and the OT,<sup>4</sup> the

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<sup>1</sup>While the exact meaning of the following texts remain debatable, that there is a church in heaven appears evident from Eph 2:19-22; Eph 5:22-33; and Col 1:18.

<sup>2</sup>For further study, see Donald Guthrie, New Testament Theology (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 701-789; Alan Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament (London: SCM Press, 1958), 266-290; and P. T. O'Brien, "The Church as a Heavenly and Eschatological Entity," in The Church and Bible in the World, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 88-119.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Eugene Bianchi, review of The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Catholic Mind 63 (October, 1965): 55-56.

<sup>4</sup>This can be in part traced back to the fact that Berkouwer does not really connect the church of the NT with that of the OT except through election. His mention of the election of Israel in regard to Rom 9-11, for example, emphasizes the point that election is of grace and not of works and that election cannot be, therefore, considered an eternal decree (Return, 336). In regard to the task of the church, Berkouwer relates the function of the church to Israel's task minimally when he writes, "All of this [Israel's election] does not mean that Israel "goes forth," is sent into the world, as is the case later with the Church. But there is a clear relationship, since Israel's existence has been given as a sign that must lead nations to turn to Israel's God. The mystery of Israel's existence on the basis of God's love implies the perspective for the world. It is the canvas for the later Messianic

concept of the remnant, God's role in the origin of the church, or the role of Christ as head of his body. Christ, in Berkouwer's ecclesiology, plays a much greater role as the essence or content of the proclaimed message than as the ontological foundation of the church.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Christology as the primary foundation for ecclesiology seems to be somewhat mitigated.

Berkouwer's stress on the empirical also creates somewhat of a tension regarding the role of faith in understanding the nature of the church. He may very well have inconsistently applied his principle of correlation to his view of the church.<sup>2</sup> While he emphasizes the fact that we understand the church from her visibility, he lessens the verity that some aspects of the reality of the church must be viewed from one's faith and involve the perspective that it brings since these dimensions lie beyond our ability to comprehend them.<sup>3</sup> Though it must be recognized that Berkouwer has warned against this practice, when viewed primarily from an empirical perspective, the church risks being

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time of fulfillment, when all boundaries are crossed over" (Church, 404). Furthermore, in n. 38, Berkouwer concludes that while Israel herself was not a missionary, her election does have a missionary sense. For Berkouwer, the relationship between the church of the NT and that of the OT is a minimal, illustrated by the fact that there is no discussion of the relationship of ekklesia and qahal in his writings.

<sup>1</sup>Berkouwer discusses this significant point in only seven pages (84-91) in Church. One short paragraph comments on the union of Christ with his church (85). The headship of Christ over the church is mentioned in passing (87-91), where the emphasis is upon refuting the identification of the church and Christ. Interestingly enough, the rest of the section, 88-91, deals with the mystery of the church as that mystery is being revealed and is empirically visible. Here Berkouwer wishes to avoid a view of the church which does not take into consideration her concrete life on earth (88).

<sup>2</sup>Correlation, for Berkouwer, means that the essentials of the Christian doctrines must be perceived by faith. One cannot build his understanding upon the categories of logic and speculative knowledge. See chapter 2, pp. 59-62.

<sup>3</sup>Berkouwer also seems to neglect the Biblical definition of faith as pointing to us to certainty in things unseen and things we hoped for (Heb 11:1-2--see also Rom 4:20-21, where the definition of faith is being fully persuaded that God has the power to do what he promised although there is no evidence of sight).

scientifically categorized on the basis of what is seen, thus allowing her to be defined from her historical presence rather than from Scripture.<sup>1</sup> This tends to introduce a certain confusion when formulating a doctrine of the church. Theologians are not certain themselves what the church's nature is because they are unsure of what her parameters and perimeters are since the latter change so frequently according to the historical situation.<sup>2</sup> What results is an increasingly subjective perception of that nature.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, Berkouwer's emphasis on the empirical over and against the metaphysical runs the risk of overlooking the importance of the ontological dimensions of the church when considering her nature

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<sup>1</sup>Even the mystery of the church is defined as that which is seen not with the eyes of faith but from her revelation in history. It must be admitted, however, that this is in consonance with at least one of the methods of doing theology, i.e. that which starts with the questions that society asks and then moves backward to Scripture to find answers. This method is especially evident in Paul Tillich's view of theology and its apologetic purpose. See Tillich, 1:18-22, and Alexander J. McKelway, The Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1964), 37-45. For further study, see Hendrikus Berkhof, Introduction to the Study of Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 9-15; John Stacey, Groundwork of Theology (London: Epworth Press, 1977), 66-81; Owen Thomas, Introduction to Theology (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Greeno, Hadden and Company, 1973), 12-13; idem, Theological Questions (Wilton, Connecticut: Morehouse-Barlow, 1983), 11-20; and Walter Kaiser, Towards an Exegetical Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981). In the stress upon the empirical nature of the church, the influence of modern science and its methodology can be seen in Berkouwer's case. Scientific method emphasizes what can be observed and quantitatively measured. See, for example, Frederick Grinnell, The Scientific Attitude (London: Westview Press, 1987); Ronald Giere, Understanding Scientific Reasoning (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1984); Rom Harré, Principles of Scientific Thinking (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970; and J. T. Davies, The Scientific Approach (London: Academic Press, 1965). The stress on the unity of the church demonstrates the effect of the world's perception of the church as being disunified and is related to Berkouwer's apologetic concerns. See Modern Uncertainty, 85-86 and Church, 42-46.

<sup>2</sup>Erickson, 1030.

<sup>3</sup>This subjectivization of theology has proven useful to Berkouwer in his quest for unity, as we see below.

from the Biblical perspective.<sup>1</sup> Hence, certain Biblical statements which describe the church in terms of what she is rather than what she does tend to be ignored. The meaning of the headship of Christ over the body (1 Cor 12:12-31), the church as the temple of the Holy Spirit and the role of the Holy Spirit in her (Eph 2:19-21), and the church as the "fullness of Christ" (Eph 1:22) are hardly addressed. Furthermore, there is little discussion concerning how individual believers are connected to each other even though they are separated geographically (1 Cor 12:12-13, Rom 12:3-8), the origin of the church, God the Father's role in that origin, and the connection of the NT church with the OT Israel (Gal 6:16, Rom 9:6-9), how one becomes a member of the church through incorporation into Christ (1 Cor 6:12-17, Rom 12:1-8), how the priesthood of all believers is connected with the High Priestly ministry of Christ (1 Peter 2:4-10, Heb 8:6-12), and how the church in heaven is connected with the ekklesia on earth (Heb 12:22-24). The implication for the church is that her theologians are discouraged from asking the question of what makes the church what she is, apart from her connection with what she does. Here, Berkouwer may have hampered ecclesiological inquiry and somewhat weakened the importance of the ministry of the church by neglecting the fact that what the church does in her ministry is directly affected by what her members perceive her to be.<sup>2</sup> In this

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<sup>1</sup>Ontology asks such questions as What is being-in-itself? What does existence mean and what is the basis for that existence? For the purposes of this present study, I am making a distinction between an "ontological view" of the church and "ontological" aspects of her nature. The former would include the Roman Catholic view of the church as the continuing incarnation of Christ, while the latter would speak to the characteristics of the church that make her unique. For further study on ontology, see Johannes Lotz, "Ontology," in Brugger, 291-292; L. de Raedemaeker, "Ontology," in New Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. J. Grooten and G. Steenbergen, trans. E. van den Bossche (New York: Philosophical Library, 1972), 303, and Angeles, 198.

<sup>2</sup>Thus, for example, if one views the church as a hierarchy, as has been the case in Roman Catholicism, the priesthood becomes separated from the laity. The role of the laity, in this view, is that of spectator. Lay persons are not truly participators in the church except vicariously through the priesthood. In a hierarchy, all directives come from the top and the lay person has little input, thus minimizing the

regard, Earl Radmacher (8) aptly reminds us "that understanding the nature of the church is basic and foundational to her programming and her activities."<sup>1</sup>

The Visible and Invisible  
Church

The church, for Berkouwer, is not some esoteric entity which lies beyond our understanding, but, as he continually reminds us, a functional body living in the concrete everyday history of this world, and whose goal is the preaching of the gospel to lost but living humanity.<sup>2</sup> Hence, Berkouwer has led to a clearer understanding of the church's nature when he emphasizes that the church is to be perceived as both visible and accessible rather than as a structure that exists or finds fulfillment in some distant, future, invisible church, a view often championed by traditional Christian thought.<sup>3</sup> She manifests herself now on this earth, as well as when looking forward to her future. "Eschatology," according to Berkouwer, "is not a kind of futurism. It leads to responsibility for the here and now. Any

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doctrine of spiritual gifts and the priesthood of all believers in the church (see Dulles, Models of the Church for further study on the effect of one's view of the church on her ministry).

<sup>1</sup>Hence, when one speaks about ministry, one must speak about the nature and understanding of what the church is. See, for example, Franklin Segler, A Theology of Church and Ministry (Nashville: Broadman, 1960), 1-36; George Tavard, A Theology for Ministry (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1983), 7-28; and Lawrence Richards and Gib Martin, A Theology of Personal Ministry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 1-142.

<sup>2</sup>Mystery for Berkouwer is something that cannot be completely understood by humans because it is revealed by God in history for the very first time (Man, 111, and "Revelation, II," 23). Thus, when he speaks of mystery, Berkouwer has in mind something that is concretely historical rather than abstract and esoteric. As Smedes ("Berkouwer," 69) has so aptly pointed out, this understanding stresses that the church lives in correlation with her pulpit. That is to say, theology and, therefore, ecclesiology must be preachable.

<sup>3</sup>Church, 37-39. See also Heideman, 65. We are reminded here that Martin Luther held that the true church had no historical embodiment but was invisible.

eschatology that misses this is illegitimate, and must find the way of responsible living in the present."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore,

The *eschaton* in the New Testament is never unrelated to the present day. I [Berkouwer] know of no text that speaks about the future without at the same time speaking about the present. . . . Everything that is proclaimed about 'last things' is pointed straight at today. We are told to pray to be given the powers of the future age, so that we can be in their service today."<sup>2</sup>

His emphasis upon the church's historicity has led Berkouwer to decrease if not reject the traditional Protestant emphasis upon the invisible/visible description of the church.<sup>3</sup> He does this for three main reasons. First, he wishes to challenge the view that unity occurs only in the invisible church, a concept which he perceives as mitigating the church's recognition of her guilt as far as her disunity is concerned. "We cannot use the scalpel of the spiritual [invisible] unity to cut away our guilt for the visible disunity of the church."<sup>4</sup> The church, in Berkouwer's opinion, must exhibit her unity and uniqueness now since it is of her essence and since that unity and uniqueness is an integral part of her witness to the reconciling power of God.

So then is the unity in the uniqueness a powerful witness in the world. That the world may believe in the mystery of the coming of Jesus Christ and in the unique witness concerning him, the light will then break, also over a broken world. In her word and her works then shall the Church of Jesus Christ be a living example to

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<sup>1</sup>"Church in the Last Days," 5.

<sup>2</sup>"Evangelicals," 20. See also Vunderink, "Kerk," 25.

<sup>3</sup>In his work on the church, Berkouwer devotes no more than two pages to this topic (Church, 37-39). In his rejection of the distinction of the visible/invisible church, Berkouwer has gone counter to his Reformed heritage. See, for example, Calvin, Institutes 4.1.7; Eric Jay, Church, 161-409, where the doctrine is discussed in its development from the Reformation to modern times, and R. B. Kuiper, The Glorious Body of Christ (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 26-30.

<sup>4</sup>"Evangelicals," 20. See also Vunderink, "Kerk," 25. Kromminga ("Church," 205) writes in this regard, "solutions to the disunity of the church which refer to the invisible church or that combine eschatological thinking [in Berkouwer's thought] and the invisible church are not admissible because they tend to allow us to "domesticate" the beast of disunity and to dull the Bible challenge to the unity of the church."



the world as to what the unity of the Father and Son means over against the lack of unity which is diabolical and is from him who confuses all things and sets forth the works of darkness--until the coming of the peace that shall redeem the world. . . . Out of the knowledge of the Lord shall the demon of division find his end in destruction, and of this the Church in her unity and in her unique message is the great sign for the world.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, our author writes that "unity has a radical transition in view, a conversion from unbelief to belief . . . but, apparently, this preaching can result in repentance [of unbelievers in the world] only if it is a single witness, a symphony and harmony without dissonance, resounding from clear unity."<sup>2</sup>

Second, he wishes to demonstrate that the distinction is not meant to be used to describe two different unrelated churches but a way to test the heart of the church before God as to whether she truly belongs to him.

The intention [of the Reformers' use of the metaphor of an invisible church] was definitely not to suggest two churches. . . . Their concern in using this terminology--which is imperfect, since the distinction can suggest two churches--was the testing of the Church's heart and life before the face of God, a testing about whether she truly belongs to the flock of the Shepherd.<sup>3</sup>

This is accomplished by her preaching the Scriptural message, i.e., the gospel, as well as by her acceptance of that gospel as a norm for her own life (apostolicity). Hence, insists our author, the meaning of the church should at least include a convergence of the visible and invisible church through her proclamation.<sup>4</sup>

Third, Berkouwer seeks to dispute the Roman Catholic view which identifies specific visible structures with the normativity of the church thus making her history sacrosanct, sheltering her from the need to be continually tested and reformed by the Word of God. The church,

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<sup>1</sup>"Vital Emphases," 5.

<sup>2</sup>Church, 46. See also Tangelder, Kerk," 17, and Klug, "Church," 100.

<sup>3</sup>Church, 38.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, "Church in the Last Days," 5; "Evangelicals," 20; and Church, 43-46.

he holds, must always be ready to reform herself as the norm of Scripture scrutinizes and informs her life and practice.

To the degree that Roman Catholic circles recognize this motif of testing, there is more understanding that this distinction [visible/invisible church] is intended as a critical distinction, making it possible to avoid a capitulation to the identification of ecclesiastical facts with normativity. Such an identification would make the history of the Church sacrosanct and would have made all reformation impossible. Certainly, this distinction was intended as a reference to God's *cognito ecclesiae*, a reminder of His examination of the Church (cf. II Tim. 2:19; Acts 15:8; I Thess. 2:4; Rev. 2:23), parallel to his testing of individual believers.<sup>1</sup>

Berkouwer has certainly brought our attention to the fact that the church is a historical entity which can be seen. If the church remains completely invisible, she would not be able to carry out her mission of proclamation to real and living persons, since she would have no connection with concrete life. While this approach has the merit of calling our attention to the fact that the church has an earthly reality and that she is not an esoteric invisible body, emphasizing the visible church so strongly is not without danger. More attention, it seems, could be paid to the New Testament statements which stress or at least imply the reality of an invisible church, a church which exists but that cannot fully be seen by human eyes and which is important in the plan of salvation.<sup>2</sup> God's true people have often existed unrecognized by the world or even by the members of the visible church. Nonetheless, they are known by God and belong to his true people.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Church, 38.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, the parable of the net in Matt 13:47-52; the parable of the sheep and goats in Matt 25:31-46; Heb 12:22-25; and Eph 1:22-23.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, 1 Ki 19:18, where Elijah complains to the Lord that he is the only one left in Israel who has been faithful to God. The Lord rebukes Elijah by informing him that there are seven thousand in Israel who are faithful to him and who have not followed Baal. This idea is corroborated by John 10:16 where Jesus tells his listeners that the Father has sheep which are not of his pen, and 1 John 2:18-19, which states that there were some who went out from among us (believers) who really did not belong to us. These latter texts demonstrate that there are both people who are not in the church but are of the church and known by God and that there are those who are in the

The Attributes of the Church

In his book on the church, Berkouwer does not attempt an in-depth examination of the dogmatic locus de ecclesia but rather undertakes a careful reflection on the church organized around the four attributes confessed in the Creed.<sup>1</sup> This enables him to keep his attention focused on the broader sweep of several interrelated theological questions, more particularly those of the unity and holiness of the church, rather than confining himself to the more traditional themes of Protestant ecclesiology such as her visibility and invisibility, the church as organization and organism, and her three marks of the true preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of discipline.<sup>2</sup>

For Berkouwer, the empirical church should be described in terms of her attributes of oneness, catholicity, apostolicity, and holiness. These define the church as the historically concrete locus of the divine redeeming work in the midst of this world.<sup>3</sup> The attributes, therefore, are intimately related to the church's responsibility for mission. Thus, Berkouwer calls for the church to recognize this missionary dimension as part of her very essence. He beckons her to see herself in terms of "a world diaconate, a self-giving service to the dispossessed that reflects a responsible concern for the cause of the

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church but who do not belong to the true church.

<sup>1</sup>Kromminga, "Church," 203. While the original order of the attributes of the Creed are unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam ("Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed," in The Creeds of Christendom, trans. Philip Schaff, 3 vols. [New York: Harper Brothers, 1919 {4th ed.}], 2: 57-58), Berkouwer has grouped them in the order of unity, catholicity, apostolicity, and holiness. It must be kept in mind that when he shifted his thought in regard to Roman Catholic ecclesiology, Berkouwer gained a new appreciation for the nature of the church expressed in the attributes.

<sup>2</sup>John Hadley, review of The Church, by G. C. Berkouwer and A Pope for All Christians, ed. Peter J. McCord, in Clergy Review 44 (February, 1979): 69, and Vunderink, "Kerk," 25.

<sup>3</sup>Church, 14-15, and Muller, 398-399.

gospel."<sup>1</sup> The attributes, he insists, "need to be given serious attention since they are not without implications for the world that she is trying to witness to." The relationship between the church's attributes and her mission must constantly be brought to the church's memory so that she does not become complacent in her duty to her mission by appealing to them as prima facie evidence that she is the true eternal church.

While he is to be commended for focusing our attention on the importance of the attributes of the church and their bearing on her function, Berkouwer has not been without creating some confusion on the subject. Traditionally, the attributes of the church have been viewed as part of her essence, and, as such, have been considered as descriptive of the church through all ages.<sup>2</sup> Thus, as Paul Avis notes, "Having accepted without question the credal marks of the church, the Reformers would add the important qualification that it is one thing to describe the nature of the church as holy, catholic, etc, but quite another to say where the true church is actually to be found."<sup>3</sup> Accepting Berkouwer's view, however, seems to leave one to understand the role of these attributes in one of two ways. Either they have lost their primary significance in defining the church's essence and thus can only be understood as secondary to her more weighty task or function, or, rather than being linked to the church throughout all ages, should

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<sup>1</sup>Return 329; Conflict, 35; and the section on the attributes in chapter 3 above. Mission in this sense is based on the very nature of the church as expressed in the attributes. See also Bloesch, 47.

<sup>2</sup>The contention over the attributes between Protestants and Roman Catholicism was whether they could be considered as empirical proof of the true church (Church, 13-25, and Crowe, 143). In fact, Berkouwer's argument against Rome on this point was that the attributes are of the universal church of all times. They could not be used to test the ecclesia vera of any given historical era. Thus, he holds that the Reformers introduced criteria for testing the church in a given time period through the marks. It is striking at this point for Berkouwer that the attributes of the church were never disputed since the Reformers never rejected nor opted for other ones (Church, 24-25).

<sup>3</sup>Avis, Church, 8.

be considered as descriptive of the church in her historical setting at one particular time.<sup>1</sup> If the latter is the case, the Reformers may have erred when they introduced the notae to test whether a church is the true church as they rejected the Roman Catholic practice of appealing to the attributes as proof that Rome was the ecclesia vera. Either case, however, does not seem to appear in line with the Scriptural witness. The attributes, as expressed in the NT, appear to describe qualities of the church of all times,<sup>2</sup> while the church's notae seem to be used in the NT to describe, at the very least, the church of a particular historical period.<sup>3</sup>

Although Berkouwer has not gone so far as to converge the attributes and the notae, it appears that he has, in some respect, moved closer to the Roman Catholic position while at the same time attempting to maintain that the attributes must be tested by the one true nota, i.e., the Word of God, taking a middle position between the Reformation and Roman Catholicism. It appears here that Berkouwer attempts to resolve the tension between the attributes and the notae so that one of

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<sup>1</sup>See Zachariah, 189, and Zorn, 6. In regard to the first conclusion, Berkouwer ends his work on the church with a section on the whole question of the plantatio ecclesiae because he feels that the church lacks appreciation for the expectation of the kingdom (see Church, 391-420, and Return, 424-454). Hardy (378) suggests that Berkouwer placed holiness last in his expression of the attributes of the Creed (the original order is one, holy, catholic and apostolic which Berkouwer has changed to one catholic, apostolic, and holy) to allow him to work toward the expression of holiness in mission to the world as his climax. This was most likely done in the light of his concern for the visible unity of the church in which the proclamation of the gospel plays such a central part.

<sup>2</sup>For example, on unity, see John 17:20-21, Eph 4:3-12, and Gal 3:27-29; on holiness, Eph 1:4, 5:27, Col 1:22, 3:12, and 1 Peter 1:15-16; on catholicity, Matt 28:19, Acts 1:8, Matt 10:23, and Heb 8:10-13, the latter a fulfillment of true catholicity; and on apostolicity, Eph 2:19-21.

<sup>3</sup>This is true especially of the remnant church of the book of Revelation. We find the "notae" of the church to be keeping the commandments of God and holding to the testimony of Jesus, i.e., the spirit of prophecy (Rev 12:17, 14:12, cf. 19:10). The same idea is reflected in 1 John 3:22-24, where we are told that those who "obey his [Jesus] commands live in him and he in them [believers]."

the barriers to ecumenical dialogue, especially with Roman Catholicism, might be minimalized. This understanding of the attributes seems to have resulted from Berkouwer's acceptance of Schilder's "dynamic view" of them, which permits them to become the undergirding foundation for expressing the function or mission of the church. Schilder basically refuses to disengage the attributes from the dynamic of Christ's rule and testing. They become static as soon as they are isolated by themselves to prove the true church. The attributes as well as the marks can never be separated from the tension of daily obedience and, in this sense, can be viewed as an historical description of the church in any given era as long as one remembers that the attributes are under the daily obedience of the church to Christ and his Word. Therefore, the attributes describe the church as becoming rather than as ontological being, and the church herself is not static but dynamic.<sup>1</sup>

By accepting Schilder's dynamic principle regarding the attributes, Berkouwer is able to combine being and mission.<sup>2</sup> In so doing, however, he has raised a question concerning the nature of the attributes and their relation to the notae. Are they to be considered as precursors to mission, describing the church in a given historical context, or, are they constitutive elements of the church of all times and should not, as the Reformers, from a Biblical perspective, underlined so strongly, be used to "test" what the ecclesia vera is in a given historical era?

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<sup>1</sup>See Klaas Schilder, Verzamelde Werken: I. De Kerk (Kampen: J. Kamphuis, 1960), 155-156, 411-415 for a more detailed explanation of his position.

<sup>2</sup>Church, 11-24.

Ecumenism and the Nature of the Church  
in Berkouwer's ecclesiology

Berkouwer unequivocally underlines the fact that the church's involvement with the world is for one purpose and one purpose only, that of evangelization.<sup>1</sup> In the fulfillment of this task, the church must seek the deepest intent of Scripture so that she might present a lucid message to the world. Even Creeds and Confessions function solely for the purpose of making the gospel clear to all humans. For example, when discussing the confession of Chalcedon, and in reference to Christ's quest "Who do people say I am," Berkouwer candidly writes,

The preaching of the Church, in every new age, challenges us to give an answer, in our time, to the question that echoes from the neighborhood of Caesarea Philippi. . . . It was for the sake of the clarity of the salvation message that the church wanted, with its confession, to focus attention on the voiceless Lamb who opened the door to the possibility that men, like the Eunuch from Ethiopia, could meet him in preaching and go on their way rejoicing (Acts 8:35, 39).<sup>2</sup>

From a Biblical perspective, the emphasis upon evangelization is unquestionably well-taken. The need for the church to evangelize is a dominant theme in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> Matt 28:18-20, the great commission statement, has as its intention the exhortation of the church to go and testify to the gospel. If the church fails here, the world will not hear the gospel message of hope for how can they hear if the message has not been proclaimed to them (Rom 10:14-15)? In Romans, Paul implies that there is both a responsibility placed upon the hearer to listen attentively to and the preacher to faithfully proclaim the gospel, the immediate context being the gospel preached to the Jews, but

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<sup>1</sup>This is consistent with Berkouwer's understanding of the three features of providence, i.e., sustenance, which preserves the world for the purpose of grace, government, in which God governs the world in a way to accomplish his redemptive purpose, and concurrence, which implies that men have a part to play in providence as they decide whether to accept or reject God's redemptive purposes (Providence, 31-160; "Revelation," 17-18; and Smedes, "Berkouwer," 71-74).

<sup>2</sup>Half-Century, 243-245. See also Smedes, "Berkouwer," 68.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Mark 16:15; Matt 24:14; Matt 28:18-20; and Acts 1:8.

in the spirit of the great commission the wider application being to all those who must hear the gospel.<sup>1</sup> Again, in Matt 24:14, the preaching of the gospel receives its importance because it is actually a sign of the coming eschaton. The perception that the church is preparing people for the coming kingdom of God gives her a sense of purpose, destiny, and urgency. She knows what must be done and what her role is in this world. It is this sense of purpose that keeps the church relevant, enabling her to avoid turning in upon herself and separating herself from the world of human needs.

Interestingly, this accent on evangelism and on the relevancy of the church for modern society has led Berkouwer to highlight her unity, particularly in view of the ecumenical concerns of our age.<sup>2</sup> The temper of the times, his awareness of the Biblical testimony on that point, and probably his attendance at the Second Vatican Council as an invited observer, led Berkouwer to attest that any division in the body of Christ should cause us grief. It interferes with the church's

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<sup>1</sup>See John Murray, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 58-59; C. K. Barrett, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1957), 203-205; Paul J. Achtemeier, Romans (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 172-177; and, R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1945), 660-664.

<sup>2</sup>Berkouwer wrote his Doqmatic Series from the perspective of the issues that were then facing the church (Timmer, 20). That the unity of the church is one of them can hardly be doubted (see, for example, Berkouwer, "Ecumenists," 17-19; Church, 29-104; Cauthen, 332-354; Pelikan, Christian Tradition, 5:282-336; and Jay, 295-310). Berkouwer's concern for the unity of the church can be illustrated by the most serious question he raised in his book Second Vatican Council, i.e., whether Rome's view of herself as the ecclesia Christi could possibly allow for dialogue (Second Vatican Council, 19, 29). He answers in the affirmative as he sees encouraging signs in Rome (ibid., 34-56 and Bradford, 84-85). These he sees as directly related to the new theology which has produced a more open Catholicism reinterpreting itself in an ecumenical way (Second Vatican Council, 34-56; Recent Developments, 33-43, 55-64; "A Reformed View," 6-8; and Klooster, "Council," 108). Protestants, in Berkouwer's opinion, cannot afford to put the Roman Catholic Church of the future in the unbreakable mold of past pronouncements (Second Vatican Council, 34-56, and W. R. Estep, review of The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Southwestern Journal of Theology 8 [Spring, 1966]: 81).



"witness to the reconciling power of God in the world."<sup>1</sup> The implications of unity for witness in the New Testament can be seen, for example, in the unity spoken of in Eph 4:1-17; the strong language with which Paul denounces the divisions in the church at Corinth in 1 Cor 1:10-17; 3:1-23; and the call from Paul to properly celebrate the Lord's Supper in unity in 1 Cor 10:14-22 and 17:34. Particularly interesting is the unity in diversity spoken of by Paul in 1 Cor 12:12-31, which is connected with the exercise of spiritual gifts in building up the body of Christ. The outward witness of the oneness of the church as a testimony to the world had earlier been underlined by Jesus' statement that all men would know that we are his disciples if we have love for one another (John 13:35 and John 17:20-21).

One can appreciate his increasing concern and his deep longing for the visible unity of the church now.<sup>2</sup> Berkouwer continually

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<sup>1</sup>Church, 29-50; Second Vatican Council, 249-258; "Vital Emphases," 3-5; "Evangelicals," 17-19; and "Calvin and the Church," 249-252. This emphasis upon the unity of the church in Berkouwer seems to rest upon at least two factors. First Berkouwer's change of position in respect to Roman Catholicism and its ecclesiology over the years of dialogue from a conflict (Conflict, 13) to that of an ecumenical rapprochement (which is the whole tenor of Second Vatican Council). Second comes Berkouwer's apparent preoccupation with the aggiornamento or renewal of the Roman Catholic Church begun by John Paul XXIII. He regards the latter as reaching "the end of the frequently negative and antithetical posture of the Roman Catholic Church," Second Vatican Council, 17). "He [John XXIII] believed that the church was obliged to submit to a renewal of its own inner reality so that it could be more credible in the eyes and judgment of the separated brothers" (ibid., 14). See also "Rome faces Modernism," Christianity Today, 27 May 1966, 56. His high estimate of John XXIII is expressed in the eulogy Berkouwer gave John XXIII. "Paus Johannes XXIII heeft het einde van het concilie niet meer meegemaakt. Ik hoorde dat «tragisch» noemen. Hij zelf heeft dat anders gezien, ongecompliceerder en gemakkelijker. Hij heeft door zijn leven en werken en door zijn laatste strijd iets aangeduid, dat alle gelovigen raakt en wel geraakt heeft. En . . . het leven gaat verder, ook het leven der kerk. Moge het bij allen zijn een voortgang in realisme, liefde en verantwoordelijkheid. Een voortgang ook in gebed, dat met werken onlosmakelijk verbonden is" (Berkouwer, "Johannes XXIII," Gereformeerd Weekblad, 7 Juni 1963, 377).

<sup>2</sup>For some who have commented on this, see Gratsch, 375; De Waard, 59; and Van Til, Sovereignty, 50, 86. In this regard, his volume on the church has been perceived as demonstrating a greater dialogue with contemporary theology (Muller, 397), and a removal of any barriers to further ecumenical discussion, especially with Rome (Kromminga, "Council," 24). This has led Berkouwer to hold that both Roman

reminds the church that her expansion is both geographical and doctrinal.<sup>1</sup> He calls our attention to the fact that doctrinal unity (qualitative growth) is as important as geographical increase (quantitative expansion), thus stressing evangelism as being both outreach and inreach. Outreach keeps the catholicity of the church in the world and her mission to it in focus while inreach highlights the fact that the unity of the church is doctrinal and not hierarchical as each church testifies to and is connected by the same truth though not necessarily the same structure.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, such a definite emphasis upon the unity of the church is not without risk. The possibility exists that oneness might become more desirable than doctrinal purity. One cannot help but wonder if Berkouwer has been able to actually avoid this hazard. His focus, for instance, upon the urgency of the preaching of the message of the gospel, i.e., God in Christ reconciling the world to himself, the purpose of which is to be able to win modern man so that he can join the church without having too many barriers to overcome, seems to lead to a reduction of the gospel to its essential message while at the same time leaving one to wonder about the responsibilities placed upon the believer as a result of accepting Christ as Saviour. Is there not more

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Catholics and Protestants, in their mutual confrontation in a world that has come of age, are forced into a solidarity (see, for example, Second Vatican Council, 249-258; Recent Developments, 55-64; Church, 17-19; and, Oberman, "Council," 40 and Hardy, 378).

<sup>1</sup>Church, 193. His view of catholicity differs significantly from the Roman Catholic position. For Roman Catholicism, it is the structure of the church that determines her catholicity while for Berkouwer, it is the proclamation of the message of the gospel contained in Scripture.

<sup>2</sup>For Biblical support, see Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 10:16-17; 1 Cor 12:12-27; Eph 1:23; Eph 4:1-7; Col 1:18, 2:19. The image of the body implies the oneness or unity of the church (1 Cor 12:12 and Eph 4:3). It also emphasizes the church's catholicity and mission as all of the parts are to be working together to fulfill the church's mandate (Rom 12:3-8 and Eph 4:14-16). See also Paul Minear, Images of the Church in the New Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 173-221, and MacGregor, 157-175.

to Christianity than just accepting Christ as Saviour? Is not one expected, at least in the light of the Scriptures, to accept him as Lord as well, i.e., to specifically follow his teaching and that of his apostles? See, for example, texts such as John 14:15, which state that "If a person loves me they will keep my commandments" (entoles) and Rev 12:17 and 14:12 that tell us that true Christians are those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus (the testimony of Jesus being the spirit of prophecy [Rev 19:10]).

This also allows him to be somewhat flexible in what is to be emphasized when preaching the "message" of the gospel. Besides, by continually reinterpreting and reformulating the Christian tradition in terms of its historical context, Berkouwer has tended, to some degree, to insulate the modern church from her past, making it more difficult to answer the question of who she is.<sup>1</sup> This contributes to an element of uncertainty in the church's search for meaning and identity in the modern world. Making the church's proclamation relative to the parameters imposed upon her by the current historical situation seems to mitigate, to some extent at least, the notion of one church proclaiming truth everlastingly one and the same.<sup>2</sup>

As he became increasingly concerned about the unity of the church, Berkouwer began to soften his views on the differences between the various Christian traditions. He came to emphasize their similarities, hoping that this approach might contribute to an ecumenical rapprochement that would restore the church to her original unity. To foster this rapprochement, one must, in Berkouwer's view, develop a genuine interest in the views of those with whom one

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<sup>1</sup>On the reformulation of doctrine, see, for example, Second Vatican Council, 68; "Current Religious Thought," 24 May 1963, 40; "Current Religious Thought," 22 December 1961, 39; "Authority," 200-203; Half-Century, 240; Church, 289-299; Van Til, Sovereignty, 34; and Smedes, "Berkouwer," 67-68.

<sup>2</sup>See Eph 4:1-7, for example.

disagrees.<sup>1</sup> He strives to accomplish this by entering into the "theological viewpoints of other parties and highlighting the various particulars which he feels lie within the prospect of a fruitful ecumenical dialogue." His goal is to remove obstacles to dialogue, since nothing can be lost in dialoguing with each other, especially on points of convergence.<sup>2</sup> As time went by, this toning down of divergences and the concomitant stress on the unity of the church induced our author, especially in his dogmatic series, to engage in an increasing dialogue with contemporary theology, a most fruitful endeavor.<sup>3</sup>

In the context of this concern for dialogue, however, Berkouwer has chosen to contend that the Bible is no longer to be regarded as a set of propositional statements of eternal truth but merely a witness to God's salvation in Christ.<sup>4</sup> Thus, he writes, "That the gospel did not come to us as a timeless or "eternal" truth or idea

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<sup>1</sup>"Reformed View," 6-7, and P. E. Hughes, review of Recent Developments in Roman Catholic Thought, by G. C. Berkouwer, In Westminster Theological Journal 21 (1959): 187.

<sup>2</sup>"Evangelicals," 17-20; Kromminga, "Council," 24, and Porter, 240-242.

<sup>3</sup>Muller, 397. This is especially notable in the later volumes of the series. For instance, see Holy Scripture (DE 1966-1967), especially the chapters entitled "Authority and Interpretation," 105-138, and "Faith and Criticism," 346-366. In the former, Berkouwer carries on dialogue with Roman Catholicism, Bultmann, Tillich, and modern scientific methodology. In the latter, he dialogues extensively with Neo-Protestantism and its view and use of historical-criticism. In his volume The Church (1970-1972), Berkouwer also carries on extensive dialogues with Roman Catholicism, Herman Ridderbos, and the ecumenists.

<sup>4</sup>Holy Scripture, 365-366, 170-194; "Thought," 31 July 1964, 48; and "Thought," 13 April 1962, 56; and Church, 255-256. He had previously held that Scripture was infallible propositional truth. See chapter 2, pp. 68-71. This position reminds us of the famous eight propositions of Karl Barth (CD I, 2, 527-537). This has created, for Berkouwer, a problem regarding his definition of the term "inerrancy". Error in the Bible refers to incorrectness or honest mistakes recorded by the authors of Scripture. It does not mean that the Biblical writers intended to deceive their readers. This allows him to be ambiguous concerning the inerrancy of Scripture. In the opinion of Bogue ("Evolution," 141 n. 28), according to Berkouwer's definition any work could be considered "inerrant" if the author's intent was not to deceive.

became increasingly clear. It was seen as a message of salvation received, interpreted, and handed over by men. And the God-breathed character of that Scripture was confessed by the church."<sup>1</sup> This appears, however, to mitigate the Scripture's own witness to the fact that it does contain propositional truth. For example, we read in 1 Sam 3:19-21 that the Lord "continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word."<sup>2</sup> Again in Luke 24:25-27, Jesus explains to the two on the road to Emmaus about the necessity of his suffering by appealing to the statements confirming such made by Moses and the Prophets.<sup>3</sup>

The result of accepting the Bible as a witness of salvation rather than as statements of truth has moved Berkouwer towards making doctrine of little importance in comparison with sharing Christ and believing in him for salvation. However, the NT witness clearly holds that doctrine is important for the church. For example, in 1 Tim 4:6, Paul tells Timothy to "point these things out to the brothers . . . the truths of the faith and the good teaching that you have followed." Again in Titus 2:1, "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine."<sup>4</sup> Since it is the message about Christ which is important, there is a tendency for Berkouwer to reduce the unique features of Christianity to a general message with few specifics. While this provides Christians with an effective key for initiating and pursuing dialogue, it also risks to move them towards a unity founded on a

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<sup>1</sup>Holy Scripture, 184.

<sup>2</sup>The word used here is dabar. This word has the connotation of a word, speaking, speech or thing. Here it implies that God spoke truth as well as revealed himself to Samuel. According to C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, what is being said here is that God was revealing himself to Samuel through "a prophetic announcement of His word" (The Books of Samuel, trans. James Martin [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960], 51-52). For other OT references, see Dan 2:46-47, 19-23, and Isaiah 22:14.

<sup>3</sup>See also Matt 11:25-27 and Eph 3:1-6.

<sup>4</sup>See also other texts such as Gal 1:6-8; 1 Tim 1:3-7, 2:3-4, 3:15, 2 Tim 1:13, 4:1-3; Titus 1:9; and John 8:31-32.

reductionist understanding of the Scriptures which ignores specific teachings of the same.<sup>1</sup>

Stressing the unity of the church while minimalizing doctrinal differences not only tends to produce a paucity of distinctive Biblical truths, it also encourages a certain ambiguousness as to what the purity of Scriptural truth amounts to. Although he stresses that the attributes of the church remain under the testing of the one nota of the church, i.e. Scripture, Berkouwer's view of her oneness seems to lead to that which he himself elsewhere disapproves, i.e., a church in which unity has become more important than an understanding of truth centered on the Scriptures.

Finally, it is of great importance how one thinks about the way in which Christ rules his Church. Our confession says He rules his church through his *Word* and *Spirit*. That is the touchstone of the real church: the church under the Word. Does she bring, as Paul says, into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, and does she cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God? In a divided world with so many dangers, the divided Church can sometimes long for the visible unity of the Church. That can be according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and his prayer [quotes John 17:21]. But never are we, in this longing for unity, allowed to separate this unity from the truth of which He speaks in the same prayer. . . . And there is a danger, that against the background of this unity an "ecumenical" theology will be created without the primacy of the truth of the Gospel.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For example, one wonders whether Smedes' ("Berkouwer," 93) charge that Berkouwer has relied too heavily on justification and not enough on sanctification through the indwelling of Christ might have some merit. See also Dyck, 168. The focus on the message rather than the specifics is related to the distinction between form and content, a distinction he appears to have accepted from John XXIII (Second Vatican Council, 22-24). The content or intent of a statement is to be taken in its historical context, which is limited in scope and focus to one issue. Thus, Berkouwer believes that the Tridentine statements can be modified to soften the differences between Rome and the Reformation (ibid., 42-44). Even the declaration of an ecumenical creed such as Chalcedon cannot be considered to be a terminal point for doctrinal expression (Person, 85-97, esp. 91). A number of years earlier, Berkouwer himself objected to the distinction between form and content in Het Problem de Schriftkritiek (1938).

<sup>2</sup>Modern Uncertainty, 82. See also "Vital Emphases," 4-5.

### Conclusion

As a result of his ecumenical interests and an expanding dialogue with Roman Catholicism, Berkouwer has been drawn further and further from the categories and interests of a Biblical ecclesiology. Hence, he strikes one as standing with one foot in a Scriptural heritage he refuses to abandon and the other in a world of ecumenical concerns that at times clash with that heritage.<sup>1</sup> The clash may indeed have caused him to overlook some important aspects of the Biblical view of the church.<sup>2</sup> While his doctrine of the church is a major contribution to the twentieth-century ecumenical debate and continually reminds us that the church must evangelize, it loses much of its impact on modern theology mainly because of its incomplete Biblical picture of the church, an incomplete picture which may have very well resulted from his undue emphasis upon her mission.

### Final Considerations

In the context of the major concerns addressed by contemporary ecclesiologists,<sup>3</sup> Berkouwer has made a substantial contribution to

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<sup>1</sup>See, for instance, Muller, 398, and Karlberg, 307 n. 35.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Bogue, "Battle," 383, and Karlberg 309.

<sup>3</sup>At least four major questions are involved in understanding the nature of the church that modern ecclesiology should address (see Mascarenhas, 1-11; Dulles, Models of the Church; and Erickson, 1025-1146). The first is that of the church's ontology, a question concerned with what the church is. It seeks to ascertain what qualities make the church what she is. Included in the group which primarily dealt with this question in their ecclesiology are Augustine, Calvin, Luther, and the Reformers as well as most Roman Catholic ecclesiologists (for the Reformers, see, for example, Avis, 1-80. In regard to Roman Catholicism, see Dulles, "Half-Century," 419-442).

There is also the question of her function, her role, and purpose. The primary emphasis is on the church's fulfillment of her mission in the world through the proclamation of the gospel so that all may have a chance to make a decision regarding Christ and become members of the church. Those who focus mainly on this question include Berkouwer, Leslie Newbigin, and Paul Tillich, and generally includes the ecumenical theologians (see, for example, Jay, 332-409, and Pelikan, Christian Tradition, 5:282-324).

Next comes the eschatological dimension of the church. What will the church become, what is her future state to be? This question does not focus so much on the church here and now as it considers the

contemporary theology and its understanding of the doctrine of the church.

His view bridges the gap between the "ideal" and "empirical" church and has given the church a new missionary consciousness. While this approach has no small significance for the church, the pressing question of the proper relationship between the church's nature and function has hardly been solved. Since philosophy and theology have traditionally made a distinction between the church's nature and her function, one wonders whether one can legitimately speak of the church's essence and function as being synonymous as does Karl Barth when he speaks of the church in terms of her witness-being.<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiological studies would gain from a further investigation of the issue in general, not to mention from a more careful comparison of Barth and Berkouwer's views on the subject.

There is also Berkouwer's stand on the visible and invisible church. Here, too, the Dutch theologian has moved the church beyond traditional Protestant thought which tended to view the fullness of the reality of the church as a distant future entity, something invisible rather than visible. This he has done by emphasizing that the church is

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coming eschaton where she will reflect her true fullness and unity. Mascarenhas (4) places Oscar Cullmann, Rudolf Schnackenburg, Joachim Jeremias, and Werner Kümmel in this category. One could also include here Jurgen Moltmann and his theology of hope (see also Cauthen, 348-354).

Finally, there is the issue of the praxis of the church, i.e., her involvement in this world's socio-political arenas. This concern focuses primarily on the church's role, and that of the gospel, in fighting unjust socio-political systems and structures today to bring them under the mandate of Christ so that the oppressed and down-trodden may be liberated from their tyranny. Mascarenhas (4) places Segundo, Boff, and Cone in this category, to which the names of other liberation theologians might be added (see, for example, Leonardo Boff, "Theological Characteristics of a Grassroots Church," in The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities, ed. Sergio Torres and John Eagleson [Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1980], 124-144, and, Howland Sanks and Brian Smith, "Liberation Ecclesiology: Praxis, Theory, Praxis," Theological Studies 38 [1977]: 3-38).

<sup>1</sup>See CD IV, 1, 650. Although Barth himself does not use this terminology, it is clear that this represents the direction of his thought about the church.



called to manifest herself now, on this earth, and not merely in some distant future. Some questions remain, nonetheless. Is the church visible, invisible, or can the two be connected in such a manner that the fullness of their relationship be expressed and kept in tension without having to neglect aspects of one or the other?

His stress on the visible church has led Berkouwer to speak primarily of the visible universal church on earth. From this perspective, the local church and her function are hardly dealt with. Further attention needs to be given to this specific ecclesiological issue, more particularly from the perspective of how the local church relates to the church universal, whether visible or invisible.

Berkouwer has convincingly underlined the relationship existing between election and the nature of the church. For him, election is the basis for evangelism, not its antithesis. He rejects election as an eternal decree for if this were true the human response to grace would have little meaning.<sup>1</sup> Would not this negate all reason for proclaiming salvation? Here again, several issues deserve further examination. How does election relate to the nature of the church? Is election the foundation of the church or the outcome of the proclamation of salvation in Christ? Is election to service related to one's understanding of the holiness of the church; and if so, how?<sup>2</sup>

Finally, there is the question of the church's disunity and of its effect on her witness to the world. Unity, as Berkouwer sees it, has both external (sisterhood of churches) and internal (doctrinal) aspects. What is the nature of this doctrinal unity? How far is it to go? Can actual differences be minimalized without losing the clarity and the distinctness of the Christian message? Is there a way of

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<sup>1</sup>This has caused some to accuse Berkouwer of being an Arminian. See, for example, Hoeksema, "Critique," 43; Bogue, Hole, 19; Bogue, "Evolution," 151-152; and Osterhaven, "Election," 51.

<sup>2</sup>Berkouwer primarily understands the church's holiness as being set aside for mission.

achieving and expressing doctrinal oneness without coming to a lowest-common denominator unity?

The questions which Berkouwer has raised in regard to the church's nature as well as those that derive from them are difficult and challenging. They will continue to give us much to think about. They may receive pertinent resolutions only as theologians, following Berkouwer's counsel, wrestle with them under the guidance of the Spirit and attempt to formulate answers to them on the basis of the Scriptures.

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